Objective Morality
Based on Scientific and Rational Reasoning

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Part 1
Introduction

My purpose in writing this is to argue for the existence of an objective morality based entirely on rational and scientific reasoning. By "objective morality" I do not simply mean that morality exists in the sense that various societies consider various actions to be immoral. What I mean is that certain actions are inherently right or wrong regardless of what any society thinks about them. In other words, I mean that there is an "objective morality" which exists independently of human beliefs and human civilization. There are many people who have the opinion that it is not possible to believe in such an objective morality without also believing in concepts such as God or an eternal soul. I believe that they are wrong. I will attempt to show that an objective morality exists and that this morality is the same regardless of which religion, if any, is correct.

Many people believe that without a religious framework, the only possible conclusion is that all morality is nothing more than a human construct without any objective existence. In other words, what morality a person or a culture accepts is like picking a favorite flavor of ice cream. Some individuals prefer strawberry ice cream, other individuals prefer chocolate, and no person's preference is "more correct" than another's. In a similar manner, they argue, different individuals and different societies have various favorite moral belief systems, and just as with ice cream, no particular set of moral beliefs is "more correct" than any other.

A common argument for this type of thinking is the following. Throughout history, different cultures have had vastly different moral systems. In fact, on almost any moral issue, it appears that there is absolutely no agreement or consensus shared by even a majority of the cultures throughout history. In addition to this, there appears to be no way to prove the superiority of one moral system over another using logic alone. So the only way in which one moral system can actually be the correct one is if religion is the tie breaker. That is, whichever value system the "correct religion" advocates is the correct value system. Otherwise, there is no way to decide between them.

I believe that this type of argument is easily refuted. In order to argue for the existence of an objective morality, I will have to do more than just point out the flaws in lines of reasoning such as this. I will have to provide my own arguments that an objective morality does exist, and I will have to discuss where this morality "comes from". I will also have to explain a process by which we can attempt to determine what it is. This is what I intend to do. I would first, though, like to take some time to point out some of the errors in the reasoning above. There are two points that the argument above makes. The first regards the lack of consensus regarding morality. The second involves the inability to prove the superiority of one moral system over another using logic alone.

It is true that throughout history, different cultures have held vastly different beliefs about morality. These cultures have also held vastly different beliefs regarding natural physical laws. Consider, for example, the belief in gravity. Currently, it is believed that the phenomenon which we call gravity is the result of the fact that objects with mass cause a curvature in "space-time". Under this framework, we believe that a clock located in a high gravitational field will appear to run slower than an identical clock in a region with low gravity. We also believe, under this framework, that the path of something without mass, such as a beam of light, is affected by gravity. This was not always the case. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, it was believed that the phenomenon of gravity is the result of the fact that all objects with mass exert an attractive force on each other. According to this view, the path of a beam of light should be unaffected by gravity and identical clocks should run at the same speed everywhere. This had not always been the case either. At an earlier time it was believed that the natural place for objects such as rocks was on the ground while the natural place for things like steam was up in the sky. According to this perspective, rocks fell to the ground while steam rose because everything tends to go to its natural place. If we do a more thorough examination, including all the cultures throughout all of history, we will find an even larger variety of opinions regarding the law of gravity.

This does not, though, mean that there is no objective law of gravity which exists independently of human society. The beliefs in gravity which I described are attempts by human societies to approximate reality. Clearly, some approximations are better than others. Perhaps the current belief in the curvature of space-time is also incorrect and will later be replaced by an even better approximation. However, most people would have no problem agreeing that the curvature of space-time explanation of gravity is a better approximation to reality than the explanations which came before it.

All that this shows is that even though different cultures hold very different beliefs about a certain issue, this does not necessarily imply that there is no objective reality behind these beliefs. The claim which I will be arguing for is that this is the same for morality as it is for gravity. All the moral beliefs which came before us and all the moral beliefs today are, in exactly the same way as in the case of gravity, approximations to the objective reality which exists independently of human beings. Although probably none of these approximations correspond to reality exactly, as with gravity, some approximations are better than others. For example, the value system of a society which condones slavery but condemns cannibalism is incorrect, but it is a better approximation to reality than that of a society which condones both slavery and cannibalism.

The claim that no one has yet been able to prove the correctness of a particular moral system through logic alone is also correct. However, if we continue the analogy with gravity, we will realize that no one has also been able to prove the existence of gravity through logic alone either. The reason we believe that a rock will fall to the ground is because that is what we have always observed when we have let go of rocks in the past. There is a little more to it than that, of course, but not much. Our current theory of gravity predicts many specific phenomena. These include rocks falling to the ground, planets orbiting the Sun, the creation of ocean tides by the moon, and identical clocks running at different speeds. The only reason why we do believe in our current theory of gravity is because every time we have observed these phenomena, what we saw corresponded with what the theory predicted. If we were deprived of these observations, we would have no reason to believe in gravity at all. There is no way, using logic alone, that a person can prove the existence of gravity or the superiority of one theory of gravity to another. It

is only by using logical reasoning in combination with observation that a person can argue for the existence of gravity. Even then, it is not possible to do so with total 100% assurance. The fact that the current theory of gravity has always made correct predictions in the past does not guarantee that the theory will give correct predictions tomorrow. What a person can do, though, is to show, by using logical reasoning in combination with observations, that our theory of gravity is most likely true.

This is what I intend to do for morality. There are, of course, some differences in arguing for an objective moral law and an objective gravitational law. Perhaps one of the most significant is that it is possible to construct equipment which quantitatively measures the effects of gravity. That is, it is possible to construct a speed detector that tells you that a rock is moving with a velocity of ten meters per second at a certain moment in time. On the other hand, it is not currently possible to construct a morality meter which tells you that a certain action is wrong with an immorality of ten immorality units. Nevertheless, this is an obstacle which I believe can easily be overcome. I will explain the way in which I overcome this obstacle a little bit later. For now, I would just like to point out that the fact that we can not build such a detector does not automatically imply that an objective morality does not exist. It was not that long ago that we were unable to detect or measure the existence of electrons. This, however, does not imply that electrons did not exist in that time period. Electrons (objectively) existed regardless of whether or not we could build devices which detected them. The same, I believe, is true for morality.

I have divided my discussion into four parts. The first part is this introduction. In the second part, I attempt to show that it is objectively wrong to torture another person for pleasure, and I discuss where this objective morality "comes from". In this second part, I do not deal with something even as mildly complicated as torturing one person to prevent the suffering of another. Since I am trying to show that an objective morality exists independently of human beliefs, just showing that there exists one action which is objectively wrong should be sufficient to demonstrate my position that some objective morality exists.

However, just believing that an objective morality exists should not be enough to satisfy anyone’s inquiry into the matter. In part three, I discuss how we can determine what this objective morality says about controversial moral issues. As in the case of gravity, I only claim to have a method to find good approximations to this objective moral law, not to get it exactly right the first time. By spending more time applying this method to a particular moral issue, we will obtain better approximations. I give examples of how this method can be applied to issues such as abortion, war, animal rights, and forcing your morality on others. I also discuss if an action which does not harm anyone can be immoral and if it is ever correct to say that one life is "worth more" than another. In addition, I give a method for establishing a belief about if another being possesses consciousness, which is useful in attempting to determine if we have an obligation to act morally towards that being.

The fourth part is relatively independent of the rest of my discussion. In part four, I briefly discuss other alternative views about the nature and origin of morality. I touch on several topics. I discuss how a belief in God can be reconciled with the position which I advocate and why I think that it is not logically consistent to hold the opinion that a belief in God is necessary in order to believe in an objective

morality. I discuss moral systems based on ideas like karma and perfect justice which are often associated with reincarnation. I also discuss a few other views regarding morality and what I think their flaws are. I talk about what I think is wrong with thinking of morality as just a social behavior which evolved to help our survival. I also discuss why I think that it is not possible to successfully base the foundation of a society on self interest or a social contract. I also mention why morality is much more than simply attempting to maximize a certain quantity such as happiness. Nowhere in my presentation do I discuss whether any particular religion is correct or incorrect. I limit my presentation to discussing the development of a belief in an objective morality without appealing to religious teachings. I do, though, show how my position can be reconciled with various religious beliefs. I also show how the definition of morality which I am about to give can be reconciled with the theory of evolution and natural selection. In addition, I discuss if moral beliefs improve in the long run with the passage of time.

My definition of the word "morality" does not correspond to the way in which the word is usually used, but I believe that this definition closely approximates what "morality" is. In order to better explain my definition, I would first like to give an example of what "morality" is not.

Suppose that a man comes home after shopping for food at a supermarket. When his son sees him, he comments on what good and moral people the owners of the supermarket must be. He remarks that the store owners must have been very kind and generous to give all this food to his family. How do you think that his father will answer? Clearly, the father will answer that the supermarket owners did not give him the food because they were kind or generous people, but because it was in their self interest to do so. Although the store owners might indeed be good and moral people, this action is in no way any indication of this. They did what they did because they believed that the action would profit them, and for no other reason. This action, the father would conclude, says nothing about the morality of the store owners.

I will now give my definition. All actions can be placed into one of two categories. Some actions can belong to both of these groups simultaneously. However, all actions must belong to at least one of these categories. The first group consists of all actions which we do out of self interest while not harming others. Simple examples of this are riding a bicycle or watching television. These are activities which we engage in because we believe that these activities will benefit us. If an action belongs exclusively to this category, then it is of the same type as that of the supermarket owners in the previous example, and has nothing to do with morality.

The second group consists of two types of behavior. The first type is behavior which either harms or intends to harm others. The second type is behavior which we engage in, not because we believe that it will somehow benefit us in the long run, but because we believe that it will benefit others. This includes any action we do, and any action which we refrain from doing, not for ourselves, but for others.

It is the second group of behaviors with which morality is concerned. Morality, then, is engaging in behavior, not out of self interest, but because it is in the interest of others. This is how I define morality.

Many people would argue that altruistic actions belonging to the second group which I described do not exist. That is, they would argue that every action every person does is done out of self interest. If a man gives money to charity, they say, he does so only because he gets a warm and fuzzy feeling inside. If a woman donates blood, it is only because doing so makes her feel good about herself. This line of reasoning claims that all these seemingly benevolent actions are really done out of self interest. That is, people engage in such activities only to get these good internal feelings which they want.

I disagree with such thinking. Although it is correct that a woman who gives to charity will probably obtain a warm and fuzzy feeling from doing so, it is incorrect to assume that this is the only reason why she engages in this activity. This is an example of an action which can simultaneously fit both of the groups which I described. That is, this woman may be giving to charity both because she feels good after doing so and because she wants to help others. In this case, so long as it is not done entirely out of self interest, it is still related to morality. Some actions which people engage in fall exclusively into my second category, and could never be explained in terms of self interest. An extreme example of this is when a person, who does not believe in an afterlife, makes a split second decision to give up his life for others, as in a case of a soldier throwing his body on a live hand grenade in order to save his comrades. There is no way to argue that the soldier is doing this because he seeks a warm and fuzzy feeling inside, since he is not going to live long enough to enjoy it.

Human beings often attempt to persuade others into behaving a certain way by pointing out that it is in their self interest to do so. A police officer may say, for example, that you shouldn't steal because there is a good chance that you will go to jail if you do. Similarly, a mother may tell her son that he will be punished if he is found misbehaving. None of this, though, in any way influences anyone to become a moral person. It just tells people how to behave in their own self interest. The only lesson this would impart on the child is that if he wants to avoid punishment, he should not misbehave. This will not prevent him from misbehaving the moment he knows that his parents aren't watching, or after he grows up and moves out of his parents' house. Similarly, this type of reasoning will not convince a person not to steal if he finds himself in a situation where the chances of being caught are small or non-existent. Nor is there, based on self interest alone, much reason for police officers, judges, and law makers to not abuse the power of their positions.

What religions often do with regards to morality is to argue that it is always in a person's self interest to behave "morally". Some religions teach, for example, that if you engage in murder, rape, or torture, you will go to Hell. Others teach that if you engage in such activities you are going to have a very unfortunate next reincarnation. Others may believe that there is no life after death, but that you will be punished in this life for engaging in improper acts. However, this does not really tell anyone to be a moral person. This, again, just tells people how to behave in their self interest. If a woman refrains from killing other people only because she does not want to go to Hell, or if a man gives to charity only because he does not want to be reincarnated as an insect, then these activities have nothing to do with morality. As in the case of the supermarket owner, these people are just acting in their self interest. A religious person can, of course, be acting morally if he engages in activities for the purpose of benefiting others as well as seeking a reward. It is just that, as with the supermarket owner, although an action may have the side effect of benefiting other people, it is not related to morality if seeking a reward or avoiding a punishment is the only motivation.

But then the questions before us are the following. Without making an appeal to religion, why is it that we "should" behave "morally"? Why is it that we "should" engage in activities which benefit others and refrain from activities which harm others? In a situation where which course of action is moral is itself a matter of debate, how is it possible, without using religious concepts, to persuasively argue that a particular answer is in fact the correct one? It is these types of questions which I will attempt to answer.

Part 2
Proving the Existence of an Objective Morality

Let us suppose that we were attempting to use logic alone in order to convince a skeptic that torturing another person for pleasure is (objectively) immoral. We could say that torturing another person for pleasure is immoral because it inflicts suffering unnecessarily. However, this skeptic could then ask why it is that inflicting needless suffering is immoral. In order to answer this question, we would first have to explain what suffering feels like. After all, if a person does not know what suffering feels like, then he will never understand why it is wrong to inflict it. However, how would we go about explaining what suffering "feels like"?

We could talk about the facial expressions or the verbal sounds which the prisoner will make. However, this is not really describing what suffering feels like, since an actor can produce exactly the same symptoms without feeling any suffering, and since it is possible to feel suffering while not displaying any of these characteristics. We can talk about phenomena such as an increased heart beat or respiration. However, this does not tell us what suffering feels like either, since it is also possible to have these symptoms without suffering and to suffer without showing these symptoms. We could attempt to describe suffering as the firing of a particular group of sensory neurons in a particular way. However, this too will not give us the answer we seek. We could remove those neurons and place them in a test tube. Having those sensory neurons fire in exactly the same way in the laboratory would not involve any suffering. Simply knowing that these sensory neurons are firing, or knowing any of these mentioned measurable physical characteristics, would not really tell us what suffering "feels like".

The problem is analogous to attempting to describe to a blind man what the color green looks like. We could explain to him that light is a type of electromagnetic wave. We could then tell him that "green" is light with a certain range of frequencies. We could then also talk about which objects absorb green light and which objects reflect green light. However, none of this would get a blind man any closer to understanding what "green" looks like. The only way we can currently describe to a person what a color looks like is by comparing it to other colors. We might say, for example, that "green" is a cross between yellow and blue. However, this is of no use to a blind man since he does not know what yellow or blue look like either.

This is exactly the problem we face in attempting to tell the skeptic what suffering feels like. We could attempt to explain what the tortured victim is feeling by comparing it to feelings of suffering which the skeptic has experienced in the past. However, a proof based only on logic can not make appeals to past experiences or to sensations. If we wanted to use only logic to prove that it is immoral to inflict needless

suffering, we would have to be able to explain what suffering "feels like" using logic alone also. This, however, is not currently possible. It is only here that an attempt to use logic alone to prove the existence of an objective morality breaks down. This does not mean, though, that we can not use a slightly different method to argue for the existence of an objective morality.

There are two different ways we can go about explaining the probable truth of a statement. The first is by explaining why we believe that the statement is true. The second is by attempting to explain what causes the statement to be true. Take, for example, the statement, "the sky looks blue". Explaining why we believe that this statement is true is fairly simple. We look up at the sky, and we see that it looks blue. Explaining what causes this statement to be true turns out to be much more difficult. This would require explaining that light is a type of wave and explaining the properties of wave propagation. Only then would we really understand "why" it is that light having the frequency associated only with the color blue reaches our eyes when we look at the daytime sky.

I will attempt to look at the statement "An objective morality exists" from both of these perspectives. That is, I will talk about why we should believe that the statement is true and about what causes the statement to be true. However, as the previous example shows, it is possible to know why we should believe that a statement is probably true without knowing what causes it to be true. The vast majority of people know that the sky looks blue, and why it is that we should believe that the sky looks blue, while they at the same time have almost no knowledge of wave propagation.

I will first discuss what "causes" the statement "An objective morality exists" to be true. My claim is that it is not necessary to believe in concepts like God or an eternal soul in order to believe in an objective morality. One of the main reasons so many people initially have a hard time accepting such a claim is because one of the most popular alternative views is that we are nothing more than a congregation of atoms and molecules. In other words, the most popular alternative view is that our consciousness is nothing more than complicated electrochemical reactions in the brain. If such a view is correct, they say, an objective morality can not possibly exist. After all, there is no morality when it comes to the physical laws governing the behavior of atoms and molecules. Our laws of physics just tell us which way an electron will go. These laws appear to say nothing about if it is "immoral" for an electron to go in a particular direction. So if we are nothing more than just a congregation of such particles, where could an objective morality come from?

I do not claim that such a view regarding consciousness is correct. I do claim, though, that an objective morality exists even if this type of view regarding consciousness does turn out to be correct. It is true that there appears to be no morality on the level of atoms and molecules. However, in exactly the same manner, there is also no consciousness on the level of atoms and molecules. It is not possible for an electron to feel happiness, joy, or sorrow. Just as the laws of physics seem to say nothing about morality, they also seem to say nothing about consciousness. The people who want to believe that consciousness results from brain activity have to conclude that, although there appears to be no consciousness in the laws of physics on the atomic level, consciousness does arise through the complicated interactions of these atoms and molecules according to physical laws. If this turns out to be

the case, then it certainly does not seem to be any less plausible that in exactly the same way, although there appears to be no morality in the laws of physics on the atomic level, morality does arise through the complicated interactions of these atoms and molecules according to physical laws. This, so far, does not actually say that an objective morality must exist. It just says that having morality arise from physical laws is no more or less plausible than having consciousness arise from physical laws in exactly the same way.

Some people have trouble imagining how it is that a congregation of atoms, which we call a human being, can possibly have a property such as an obligation to act morally, which does not also exist on the atomic level. There are many analogies which can help to illustrate this. One is a wave traveling down a rope. If you look very closely at any of the individual atoms in the rope, you will not find this "wave" of the rope in any of these rope atoms at any given time. It is only when you stand back and look at the entire rope that you can see this wave and the properties by which it travels. This does not, however, imply that this wave does not arise from the basic laws governing the motion of the rope atoms. Another analogy is a neon sign. A detailed analysis of the individual atoms in the sign will never tell you that the sign spells "Joe's Diner". I would like to say again that I am not trying to argue that human beings are just a collection of atoms and molecules. I am just pointing out that a belief in an objective morality is perfectly consistent with such a view.

The analogy between morality and consciousness is not as arbitrary as it might first appear. If we really wanted to know what could cause a statement such as "Inflicting suffering on another person for pleasure is immoral" to be true, we would first have to understand the nature and origin of suffering. This is because it would not be possible to know "why" it is wrong to inflict suffering without knowing what suffering is. As I mentioned before, suffering from physical pain is not the firing of any particular group of sensory neurons. Suffering is the way our consciousness interprets the firing of those neurons.

Explaining terms like "tree" or "rainbow" is fairly simple. To explain the term "tree", all you have to do is point to a tree. To explain the term "rainbow", all you have to do is point to a rainbow. However, when you attempt to explain the term "suffering", there is nothing to point to. Suffering is a feeling, and we can not point to feelings in this manner. "Suffering" is a state of consciousness. "Suffering" can not exist without consciousness. In order to really understand the nature and origin of suffering, we would have to understand the nature and origin of consciousness.

As mentioned before, there are some people who believe that consciousness is entirely the result of the electrochemical reactions occurring in the brain. Others believe that it is the result of a soul which exists independently of the brain and body. There are many other possible answers to where it is that consciousness comes from. If it turns out that consciousness is nothing more than electrochemical reactions in the brain, then we can understand how suffering arises from these electrochemical reactions by understanding how consciousness arises from such reactions. However, we do not currently understand how consciousness arises from brain activity, so we can not currently understand how suffering arises from brain activity. If it turns out that consciousness is the result of something similar to a soul, then we could understand the nature and origin of suffering by understanding the nature and properties of this soul. Needless to say, we do not know this either.

It is only for these reasons that we do not yet have a complete answer to what "causes" a statement such as "It is objectively immoral to inflict suffering just for the heck of it" to be true. Perhaps one day in the future, we will have a thorough understanding of what "causes" consciousness. It is only then that we would really know what the nature and origin of suffering is. It is also only then that we would really know what "causes" it to be immoral to inflict suffering just for the heck of it.

We do not, though, have to wait till that day to find out if an objective morality exists and what this objective morality is. As I said before, it is not necessary to understand what causes a phenomenon to be true in order to understand what that phenomenon is. For example, in order to understand what path a rock will take when you throw it, all you have to do is use the classical Newtonian rules of motion which have been known for some time. If you really wanted an answer to what "causes" the rock to take that path, though, you would have to understand the way in which the mass of the Earth affects the curvature of "space-time", something which we knew nothing about before the twentieth century. However, even if you know absolutely nothing about modern physics, you could still know how to accurately predict the path that a rock will take when you throw it.

Let us focus once again on the issue of torturing another person for pleasure. Even though we do not understand the nature and origin of suffering in the manner I described above, we know what suffering is because we have experienced it ourselves. It is only in understanding what suffering is in this manner that we come to understand that it is wrong for others to inflict it on us needlessly. This is not the same thing as simply observing the fact that we dislike the experience of suffering. The only way to understand this difference, again, is to experience what "dislike" is and what "suffering" is. I do not claim that experiencing suffering will necessarily cause anyone to realize that it is wrong for them to inflict suffering on others. For now, I am just claiming that by understanding what suffering is by experiencing a significant amount of it directly, a person will realize that it is objectively wrong for others to inflict needless suffering on him.

There are many objections which can be raised against this claim. In order to argue for the validity of my claim, I must do more than simply show why these objections are not valid. Before I proceed, though, I would like to point out the flaws in several of the most common types of objections people would most likely have.

A person may ask about the masochists who enjoy experiencing physical pain. Such individuals do exist, and a person can ask how this can be reconciled with my position. The answer is that suffering is not the same thing as physical pain. Just as a person does not need to feel physical pain in order to feel suffering, a person also does not need to feel suffering in order to feel physical pain. If a masochist feels enjoyment when he experiences physical pain, then clearly he is not feeling suffering during that time period. It is only when the masochist has an experience which really does cause him to suffer that he will realize that it is wrong for others to inflict suffering on him for entertainment.

A person can ask how the existence of moral relativists can be reconciled with my position. These are people who genuinely believe that no objective morality exists. Since they have all experienced suffering

in the past, why do they not believe that it is objectively wrong for others to inflict suffering on them? First, I need to say that when I referred to "a significant amount of suffering", I was not necessarily referring to a tooth ache. For some people, experiencing a tooth ache is enough. The knowledge of what a tooth ache feels like is enough to allow them to extrapolate to what the experience of being tortured probably feels like. For others, experiencing a tooth ache is not enough. There are some people who have been fortunate enough to live a life without experiencing much suffering.

Nevertheless, there are moral relativists who have experienced a significant amount of suffering in their lives. I still need to explain how their existence can be reconciled with my position. The answer is that the memory of experiencing suffering is not the same thing as the experience of suffering itself. The process of recalling the memory of a tooth ache you had a few months ago does not bring about the same agony as the tooth ache itself did. For this reason, simply recalling the memory of a painful experience might not be enough. We do not truly fully appreciate what suffering "is" except for the moment in which we are experiencing it. For some people, I believe, the memory of having experienced suffering in the past is enough to make them realize that it is wrong for others to inflict suffering on them just for entertainment. For others, the actual experience is required. I believe that it would not be possible, for example, to find any moral relativists among the prisoners of a Nazi death camp. After a few years go by, however, it is perfectly possible that some of the survivors of this camp will look back on their experience and still become moral relativists.

Another objection which can be raised is the following. It appears that the existence of morality depends on the existence of conscious beings. If it turns out that consciousness has not always existed in the Universe, then it appears that morality did not always exist either. It is possible to respond to this objection by again making the comparison to gravity. You would not see the law of gravity being applied in a region of space without objects possessing mass. This does not imply that the law of gravity does not exist in that region of space. In a similar manner, the law of morality still exists in a region of space or in a time period without conscious beings. We just do not see it being applied.

Another objection which can be raised to my position is that it relies too heavily on personal experience. It can be pointed out that since my belief that a particular action is "objectively immoral" relies on personal experience, and since different people have different personal experiences, different people are going to end up with different moralities. The morality of a person who has almost never experienced suffering, for example, is going to be very different from the morality of a person whose life has been almost nothing except suffering. This, it would appear, does not make my morality very objective.

The way to respond to this objection is by recalling the fact that, due to different observations, people in different time periods have had widely different views about physical laws as well. At one time, for example, it was believed that gravity results because all objects with mass exert an attractive force on one another. Today it is believed that gravity results because objects with mass cause a curvature in "space-time". The reason that people in the 19th century believed differently about gravity than people do today is not because the people living in the 19th century were less intelligent. It is only because people living in the 19th century did not have access to the same experimental observations which people had access to in the 20th century. All science is based on observation, whether it be the

observation of a chance occurrence or the observation of a controlled laboratory experiment. It is perfectly in accordance with the scientific method for a belief to be based on observation. It is also in accordance with the scientific method for people who have access to different sets of observation to come to different conclusions. All scientific laws and theories are only approximations to reality. The greater the number and variety of observations on which a theory is based, the greater the odds that it better approximates reality.

There are many people, however, who would find fault with this comparison to the scientific method. Scientific theories, they would argue, are based on repeatable observations which are performed many times by different observers. It must be possible for these observations to be reproduced by anyone at any time. My position relies on "personal" observations, they would continue, which do not meet this criterion. Well, let's check to see if this accusation is true. Are these observations repeatable? Clearly the answer is yes. Dropping a bowling ball on your foot is probably going to hurt just as much today as it will tomorrow. We can easily reproduce the experience of suffering for any observer at any given time. I, of course, believe that doing so would be immoral and would not recommend this course of action. Nevertheless, my argument from an individual's "personal observations" does meet the reproducibility requirement of scientific observations.

So far, I have not actually provided an argument for my claim. Up till now, I have only shown flaws in various objections to my claim. Ultimately, the objection which can be raised is that perhaps the only thing which we really observe when we experience suffering is that we dislike the experience. Perhaps the perception that something is "objectively wrong" is nothing more than an illusion. After all, we can not construct a device which measures the "morality" of an action. So why should we believe that "morality" is anything more than a figment of our imagination? Also, why should my claim be accepted by a person who has never had the impression that it is wrong for others to inflict suffering on him?

There are two cases I have to address. The first is the case of a person who has felt the impression that it is objectively wrong for others to needlessly inflict suffering on him, but chose to believe that it was just an illusion. I have to explain why this person should believe that he was observing more than the simple fact that he dislikes suffering. The second is the case of a person who claims never to have felt the impression that it is objectively immoral for others to inflict suffering on him.

I will start with the first case by tackling the issue of the lack of a "morality detector". As I mentioned in the introduction, it is true that we can not currently construct a measuring device which would indicate to us when an action is immoral. So it follows that we can not build a measuring device that tells us that it is "objectively immoral" for another person to torture us. Does this, though, imply that an "objective morality" does not exist?

While attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to keep in mind that we also can not build a measuring device which detects suffering. We can build instruments which measure the responses of the brain and body. However, none of these can measure what suffering "feels like". Since suffering is nothing more than a "feeling", we are just as incapable of measuring suffering with scientific instruments as we are at measuring morality. Should we, as a result, believe that suffering does not

exist? Should we believe that suffering is nothing more than an illusion? Clearly, the answer is no. Suffering really does exist. We all believe that it exists in spite of the fact that we can not build measuring devices which indicate this to us. It would not be consistent for a person to reject as an illusion his "observation" that it is wrong for another person to inflict needless suffering on him, while at the same time accepting as an objective truth his observation that suffering exists. If a person rejects one of these conclusions because we do not have such measuring devices, then to be consistent, he should reject both of these conclusions. Similarly, if he accepts one of these conclusions as probably true, he should accept both of these conclusions as probably true. This does not apply to a person who has never experienced the "observation" that it is wrong for others to inflict suffering on him just for the heck of it. Here, I am simply referring to a person who has had this experience but afterwards chose to think of it as an illusion.

At this point, someone may say that he does not believe that there is anything objective about the existence of suffering either. The experience of suffering, this person might respond, is never identical in any two people. This, he could continue, prevents suffering from being objective. If this is the case, then we are simply disagreeing on the use of the word "objective". When I say that a statement is "objectively true", all I mean is that it is actually the "correct" position. If a patient is experiencing suffering, perhaps no one else will ever know exactly what he is feeling. Nevertheless, the statement "the patient is experiencing suffering" is an objectively true statement in the sense that it will remain true regardless of what anyone thinks.

But still, a moral relativist can point out that it is possible that the only thing which we really perceive when we experience suffering is that we dislike it. Perhaps our senses are simply misleading us to believe that it is "immoral" for others to inflict suffering on us needlessly. I have to admit that this is a logically consistent possibility. Nevertheless, we have to put at least some trust in our senses. We should always be aware that there is a possibility that our senses are deceiving us, and that what we see or hear has no correspondence to reality. But, in the absence of further information, we should conclude that what our senses tell us probably has some correspondence to reality. Just as it is a logically consistent possibility that the perception of an objective morality is an illusion, there are many other things which are also logically consistent possibilities. Perhaps your entire life is nothing but a dream and no external reality exists. Perhaps the existence of a "free will" is just an illusion and we have no control over our thoughts or actions. Perhaps the belief that time moves forward is just an illusion, while in reality it has always been frozen at this instant. These are all logically consistent possibilities, yet most people do not believe them. In the absence of further information, most people choose to believe their senses and conclude that there is an external reality, that there is a free will, and that time does move forward. Similarly, in the absence of further information, a person should choose to believe his senses and conclude that it is immoral for others to torture him for entertainment.

But what about a person who does not believe in an objective morality and who claims to never have had the impression that it is wrong for others to inflict suffering on him? Why should anything I have said influence his position? Well, if I have done nothing else, I hope I have at least demonstrated how the belief that certain actions are objectively immoral can be reconciled with all of our current scientific beliefs. I think that one of the main reasons that there are so many moral relativists is that many people,

for one reason or another, believe that the existence of an objective morality is not logically consistent with our current scientific theories. At the very least, I hope I have dispelled these reservations.

When you debate with another person, it is not actually possible for "you" to change their mind about a certain issue. Only they can do this for themselves. All you can do is present them with reasons for them to change their mind. As an extreme example, let us say that you were debating with a person who believed that the Earth was flat. You can show him the most recent photographs of the Earth from a space shuttle, but this will not necessarily convince him. He can still believe that these photographs are a forgery and that there is a government conspiracy to brainwash the population into believing that the Earth is round. You can not "force" him to believe in a round Earth. All you can do is present your side of the argument and hope that this will influence him to rethink his position.

The same is true with morality. Just as it is not possible to "make" a person believe in a round Earth, it is not possible to "make" a person believe in an objective morality. In the case of the Earth, though, you can draw the person's attention to the photographs from the space shuttle and hope he will reexamine his beliefs in light of this. In the case of a person who does not believe that it is objectively wrong for others to torture him, similarly, all you can do is draw the person's attention to his own past experiences of suffering and hope that this will cause him to rethink his position.

So far, I have only claimed that by understanding what suffering is by experiencing it, a person can realize that it is objectively wrong for others to torture him. I have not yet shown why this should cause anyone to believe that it is wrong for them to torture others. This is the issue which I will now address. What is to prevent a person from believing that it is objectively wrong for others to torture him but that it is perfectly OK for him to torture others?

Our current scientific beliefs about the world rest on the assumption that the physical laws of the universe do not change and are the same everywhere. For example, our belief that galaxies are moving away from each other rests on the assumption that the laws of physics operate the same way in other galaxies as they do in our own. Otherwise, there would be no way to interpret as "red-shifted" the light which we receive from those galaxies. The point I am trying to make is that if we choose to reject the assumption that laws which govern the Universe are the same everywhere and unchanging, then we would have to also reject the vast majority of our scientific beliefs. So it appears that for the purposes of my argument, this assumption that these laws are "universal" is a fairly safe assumption to make.

If a person admits that it is objectively immoral for others to torture him, then he is admitting that there is some external "law" which makes it immoral. Operating under the assumption which I have just mentioned, this law must continue operating unchanged after a passage of time or a change in location. Therefore, if it is objectively immoral for another person to torture you, then it must also be immoral for you to torture another person.

But someone might protest. A person can claim that the two situations are not really the same. In one case, he is being tortured by another person. In the second, another person is being tortured by him. He could attempt to claim that this "universal law" only states that it is wrong for others to torture him.

Well, what exactly do we mean when we say that a physical law is the same at all places and at all times? When we say that a rock will fall to the ground due to gravity, do we mean just that one rock? What if we claimed that this law of gravity only stated that one particular rock will fall to the ground, while other rocks do not necessarily follow this pattern due to the fact that they are not the same rock? If this is the case, then our claim that this is a law which is the same everywhere at all times would be an extremely hollow claim. If this is truly a "universal law" then it has to apply to all rocks. Similarly, such a "universal law" of morality would have to apply to all people. Otherwise, it wouldn't be very universal.

There is one problem, though. I claimed that we can only understand what suffering is by experiencing it ourselves. If this is the case, how can we ever tell if another individual is experiencing suffering? This question might appear trivial to some people. However, in some controversial moral issues, this question is at the very heart of the matter. In the case of abortion, for example, whether or not a fetus can feel suffering is sometimes at the center of the debate. Another example is a debate concerning if we have an obligation to act morally towards insects. A person's position on such an issue is going to strongly depend on that person's belief about if insects are capable of suffering. I will leave such questions for part three of my discussion. For now, I will just focus on how to determine if another healthy adult human being is experiencing suffering. How this question is answered, though, will play an important role in determining how these other questions are answered.

Suppose that the prisoner who is going to be tortured is an enemy prisoner of war who does not speak our language. Also, there is no interpreter around. Let us hypothetically suppose that a person claimed that it is not immoral to torture this prisoner because this prisoner does not feel any suffering. How can we refute this claim? In other words, since we only know what suffering feels like by experiencing it ourselves, how can we determine if this prisoner is experiencing suffering? The answer is that we can never know with 100% confidence that another individual is experiencing suffering. We can, however, know that another individual is most probably experiencing suffering.

We know how we would react if we were in the prisoner's position. We know how our body language and facial expression would react to torture. We know what kind of verbal sounds we would make. We also know how our heartbeat and various other measurable features would respond to this torture. We also know that we would suffer. What do we see when we look at this prisoner who is being tortured? We see that his facial expression and body language are very similar to what ours would be in that situation. We see that the verbal sounds, heart beat, and other measurable features of this tortured prisoner very closely resemble how we ourselves would react. Since all these measurable characteristics are very close to what they would be in ourselves, then we can argue by induction that the characteristic which we can not measure, that of suffering, is also probably the same in this prisoner as it would be in ourselves. This is like arguing that if all you know is that the Sun has risen for the last thousand mornings, then it will probably rise again tomorrow. So we are able to conclude that this prisoner is most probably suffering as a result of torture, and that therefore it is immoral for us to continue torturing him.

In summary, an extremely simplified version of my position is the following. Moral laws are of the same nature as the laws of gravity and heat transfer. It is true that it is not possible to use logic alone to explain why it is wrong to inflict suffering on another. However, that is only because it is impossible to

logically explain what suffering is. It is only by experiencing suffering ourselves that we can come to understand what suffering is and the fact that it is wrong to inflict it needlessly. This, however, should not come as a surprise. All science is based on observation.

Part 3
Determining what the Objective Morality is

If it is true that an objective morality exists, then we need a method for determining what this objective morality is. For example, how can we determine when, if ever, it is permissible to kill another person? Let us suppose that we have already agreed that it is objectively immoral to kill another person just for entertainment. That is, suppose that by understanding what the desire to continue living "feels like" by experiencing it, a person concludes that it is objectively wrong for others to kill him for entertainment. Then, by realizing that he is not that much different from anyone else, he concludes that it is wrong to kill others for entertainment also. How can he determine if there are circumstances under which it is permissible to kill and what these circumstances are? Suppose, for instance, that a gunman enters a store and begins to shoot people. Suppose also that the only way to stop this gunman is by shooting and killing him. Is killing the gunman the correct thing to do?

The first question we have to answer is this. Does the existence of a universal moral law imply that an action which is immoral in one situation must be immoral in all situations? We can answer this by looking at another "universal law", the law of gravity. If you are standing on the Earth and let go of a ball, you will see the ball fall down. If you let go of a ball when you are in a spaceship out in deep space, however, you will see the ball remain where it is. The fact that there exists a universal law of gravity does not imply that if a ball falls down in one situation, it must fall down in all situations. Similarly, just because an action is immoral in one situation, it does not necessarily mean that it is wrong in all situations. The fact that it is immoral to kill another person for entertainment does not automatically imply that it is wrong to kill this gunman in the store.

Let us suppose that we knew absolutely nothing about the laws of physics. Let us also suppose that we were told that when you let go of a ball in a spaceship located in deep space, a very different result occurs than when you let go of a ball on Earth. Believing that physical laws do not change and are the same everywhere, we would at first be very puzzled. We would attempt to discover what the distinguishing characteristic is between the ball on Earth and the ball in the spaceship. Our confusion would go away, though, the moment that we realized that there is an extremely massive object next to the ball on Earth, namely the Earth itself, while there is no such massive object next to the ball in the spaceship. Even if we knew nothing about physics, we would for the moment be content because we have pointed out a distinguishing characteristic between the two situations which could cause the results of letting go of a ball to be very different.

Similarly, we can believe that one action, such as killing another person for entertainment, is immoral, while simultaneously believing that another similar action, such as killing this gunman in the store, is not immoral. However, in order to do so, we should be able to point out the characteristic which distinguishes the two actions, as we did in the case of letting go of a ball. In this case, the distinguishing

characteristic is that killing the gunman is the only way to prevent the gunman from deliberately killing many other people.

Often, however, it can be pointed out to us that the distinguishing characteristic we have picked is flawed. In this case, we will not be able to use this characteristic to differentiate the two actions. For example, let us suppose that when we were told the story of letting go of the two balls, we were also told that the ball in the spaceship was yellow while the ball on Earth was purple. If we genuinely knew nothing about physics, we might at first guess that it is the color of the ball which is the distinguishing characteristic. That is, perhaps the ball in the spaceship stays where it is because it is yellow, while the ball on Earth falls to the ground because it is purple. The problem with this is that someone could point out to us that yellow balls here on Earth fall to the ground as well. If the color of the ball was really the distinguishing characteristic, yellow balls on Earth should not fall to the ground either. However, since they do, color can not be the distinguishing characteristic.

Let us return to the case of the gunman in the store. Let us suppose that we claimed that the distinguishing characteristic between killing this individual and killing a person for entertainment is that killing the gunman will save more lives in the long run. That is, although we killed one person, we saved more. A person can point out the flaw in such reasoning by pointing out a hypothetical situation. Suppose that there are two people who need an organ transplant. One of them needs a heart and the other needs a liver. We know that we will not receive these organs from any organ donor in time to save the lives of these two individuals. We are also guaranteed, with 100% certainty, that these operations would be a success provided we had the organs. So, to save more lives in the long run, we decide to kill an innocent bystander and give his organs to them. In doing so, we have taken one life but saved two. So if saving more lives in the long run is really the distinguishing characteristic, then this must be the appropriate course of action. We are now left with two choices. Either we have to conclude that choosing involuntary organ donors in this manner is acceptable in this hypothetical situation, or we have to conclude that "saving more lives in the long run" is not an appropriate distinguishing characteristic. Let us suppose that, for some other reasons, we believe that this process of choosing involuntary organ donors is not acceptable. Let's say that, by imagining how we would feel if we or one of our family members were chosen to be this involuntary organ donor, we conclude that it is immoral to kill a person for his organs in this manner. In this case, we have to conclude that the distinguishing characteristic which we initially thought of is not valid.

There is, of course, another way to point out that a particular "distinguishing characteristic" is flawed. In the case of the two balls, even if we only knew a little bit about physics, we could easily point out that the color of a ball can not account for such drastically different behavior. Similarly, let us suppose that someone claimed that killing this gunman is acceptable because he has green eyes. Let us even suppose that this person was consistent in that he believed that it is OK to kill all people with green eyes. Even if we did not know much about this "moral law", we could point out that the color of a person's eyes can not account for such drastically different results. That is, the immorality of shooting another person probably has something to do with that person's desire to live or ability to experience suffering. Even if we did not know what this moral law is, we could point out that the immorality of shooting another person does not arise from that person's eye color.

The way, then, to determine if a particular action is immoral or not is the following. One person can claim that a certain action is objectively immoral by comparing it to another action which we have already agreed is objectively immoral. Another person can object to this claim in two ways. The first way is by pointing out a distinguishing characteristic between the two actions. This type of objection can be refuted by pointing out a flaw in this distinguishing characteristic. The second way to object to the claim is by comparing this particular action to another action which we have agreed is not immoral. In this case, the tables would be turned. The way to refute this second type of objection is to point out a distinguishing characteristic between the action which we have agreed is not immoral and the action in question. In this case it would be up to the person making the objection to point out the flaw in the distinction.

The scenarios which people come up with in order to make or refute an objection need not be realistic ones. They only have to be hypothetical situations which help illustrate a moral principle. The same principle holds in physics. Scenarios involving spaceships moving at half the speed of light are not very realistic. These scenarios, however, are often used to illustrate concepts in the Theory of Relativity.

I believe that it is important for me to emphasize the fact that, just like the scientific method, this method is not guaranteed to give exactly the correct answer the first time. It is fairly common for new scientific theories to overthrow and replace previous theories. There are not many scientists who actually believe that all our current theories describe reality exactly. What they do believe is that the theories closely approximate reality. The longer the scientific method is applied, the better an approximation our theories will be to reality. The same is true for this method of determining morality. Our reasoning will give us a belief which is an approximation to the true morality. However, this belief can later be overthrown and replaced by a new one. Perhaps someone in the future will, for example, think of a flaw in one of our "distinguishing characteristics" which we did not think of. Using this method, our moral beliefs, as time goes by, will more closely approximate the true morality.

This method can perhaps be called "moral reasoning by analogy". I will give examples of how this method can be applied to various controversial moral issues. However, I would first like to point out examples of what are not valid objections to a statement like "this action is immoral". Perhaps the most common one is, "This action is not immoral because the vast majority of society believes that it is not immoral". Truth is not democratic. The world does not become flat just because the majority of the people think that it is. I am writing this in 1996. Fifty years ago, segregation was considered acceptable by the vast majority of the population in the United States. Two hundred years ago, slavery was considered acceptable by the majority of the world. Two thousand years ago, it was considered acceptable in Europe to feed prisoners to lions for public entertainment. If you look further back, it was not considered immoral to have servants buried alive with their recently deceased master. In each case, morality progressed because some people looked at the morality of the majority of the population and concluded that it needed to be improved. Now is no better a time to think that we have it all figured out than were any of these other points in history.

We should also never attempt to justify our actions by pointing out that others behave similarly or worse. We have an obligation to act morally regardless of how other people are behaving. This holds

true for nations as well as individuals. Nations often attempt to justify their questionable actions by pointing out that their adversaries behave even worse. This is not a valid justification.

Another objection which is not valid is saying something similar to, "This action is not immoral because my religion says it is OK". I will discuss what is wrong with this objection in part four. For now I will just point out that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all seem to explicitly state that slavery is not immoral. Nevertheless, the majority of the people who currently believe in those religions also believe that slavery, in fact, is immoral. In part four, I will explain how such beliefs can be reconciled. For now, I would just like to state that it is possible for a person to believe that an action is immoral even though it is permitted by his religion. Otherwise, the people who believe in the three religions I mentioned would have to conclude that there is nothing wrong with slavery.

The truth of a moral statement should also not be evaluated by how difficult it is to implement it. Attempting to get rid of slavery several hundred years ago would have involved enormous practical difficulties, since many economies depended on it. Nevertheless, slavery was just as immoral then as it is now. Just as smoking does not become less dangerous due to the fact that it is difficult to quit, an action does not become less immoral due to the fact that it is difficult to stop doing it.

I will now give examples of how the method I have described can be used on various issues while continuing to explain the method. I would like to point out again that the conclusions I reach are not the final say on the matter. I am not giving these examples in order to convert people to my position on these issues, but just to illustrate how this method can be applied. Many of my positions are going to be extremely unpopular, and will seem to go against much of what we have been taught. But then, if someone in the Roman Empire had claimed that it was immoral to feed prisoners to lions for entertainment, he would have gotten the same reaction. The first example I give is determining if it is immoral to eat meat. I spend more time on the first example than I do most of the others. This is because I use the first example to illustrate common types of flaws in objections people may have to a moral claim.

Eating meat

The way a person can claim that it is wrong to eat meat is by comparing it to cannibalism. That is, since it is immoral to eat human beings, it is in the same manner immoral to eat other animals. This, of course, rests on the assumption that it is immoral to kill human beings for the purpose of eating them. Let us suppose that we have already agreed that it is immoral to eat other human beings. Perhaps we came to this conclusion by imagining how we would like it if we were killed for food. The question which we have to answer is if we can come up with a valid objection to the comparison between eating human beings and eating other animals.

The first distinguishing characteristic which we can come up with is the fact that in one case you are eating human beings, while in the other case you are eating animals. This, someone can claim, is the distinguishing characteristic between the two actions. This type of objection, though, can easily be refuted by pointing out that human beings are animals. There are some people, of course, who do not

believe in the theory of evolution and who do not believe that human beings are animals. Regardless of if the person making the objection believes that humans are animals, he can easily rephrase his objection to avoid this difficulty. He could claim that the distinguishing characteristic between the two actions is that in one, you are eating human beings, while in the other, you are eating animals which are not human beings. This, however, is not really a valid objection either.

Let us recall the example of letting go of a ball in a spaceship and letting go of a ball on Earth. We knew that the balls behave differently and we were asked what the distinguishing characteristic was between the two cases. What if we had answered that the distinguishing characteristic was that one was the ball which we let go in the spaceship, while the other was the ball which we let go of on Earth? In this case, we would not really be answering the question. The question which we were faced with was what specific feature made the two cases different. Similarly, simply saying that in one case you are eating humans while in the other case you are eating animals other than humans is not really answering the question either. The question we are faced with is if there is a feature which is possessed only by humans, which could make it immoral to eat humans but not immoral to eat other animals. Just saying "the feature of being human" is no more of an answer than saying "the feature of being the ball in the spaceship".

Since "eating meat" is my first example, I think that it is necessary to further point out why attempting to come up with such simple distinctions is not valid. If such a simple distinction was valid, a racist could claim that it is immoral to eat people of European background, while it is permissible to eat people with African background. The distinction between the two cases, this person could claim, is that in one case you are eating a person from European background, while in the other you are eating a person with African background. Clearly, this is not really answering the question of if there exists a distinguishing feature between people of European background and people of African background which would make it OK to eat one but not the other.

So in order to come up with a valid distinguishing characteristic between eating a pig and eating a human, we have to point out a feature which is possessed by humans but not by pigs. Also, since we are operating under the assumption that it is immoral to eat human beings, this feature must be possessed by all human beings. The first such feature most people initially think of is a superior intelligence and a superior brain. The problem with this is that, although it is true that humans are smarter than pigs on average, this is not true for all humans. Newborn infants, the severely mentally retarded, certain people with brain damage, and some elderly people whose minds have deteriorated all have levels of intelligence which are not superior to that of pigs. Although intelligence is not something which can be measured the way in which we can measure the mass of a ball or the volume of a liquid, any test attempting to measure intelligence which we apply equally to both pigs and to these humans will not show these types of humans scoring higher than the pigs.

The objection can be modified to say that the distinguishing characteristic is that human beings have a potential for a high level of intelligence. This feature may be shared by the infants, but it is not shared by the other humans which I have mentioned. But a person can point out that it is not impossible that some medical treatment will be developed some time in the future to treat these humans. However, this can be refuted by saying that, in a similar manner, it is not impossible that a procedure can be

developed in the future which can increase the intelligence of the animals we eat. The only reason I am bringing this up is to illustrate that the various scenarios people come up with in order to make or refute an objection do not necessarily have to be realistic ones. It is not very likely that a person with brain damage who has certain parts of his brain missing is going to have his condition reversed in his lifetime. Nevertheless, someone can claim that this is not impossible, and that this is what distinguishes him from a pig. However, if it is not physically impossible that artificial brain components will be constructed for this person, it is also not physically impossible that someone will create extra brain components for a pig. This does not mean that anyone is ever even going to attempt to create such a "treatment", it just says that it is not physically impossible. This objection and response to the objection are, of course, extremely bizarre. As I said, I bring it up primarily to show that these scenarios need not be realistic. Earlier, when I gave the scenario of the involuntary organ donor, I claimed that we were guaranteed that the operation would be a success. This too was an unrealistic scenario. However, it helped illustrate a moral concept.

Another distinguishing characteristic which a person can think of is that these mentally deficient humans have other humans, with high intelligence, who care about them. However, it is not that difficult to imagine a case of a severely mentally retarded human who has no friends or relatives, and whose death would not be noticed much by anyone. Another distinguishing characteristic which someone could come up with is that the animals we eat are raised in captivity specifically for the purpose of eating them. However, we could imagine a hypothetical society which raised a certain race of humans in captivity specifically for the purpose of eating them.

So far, we have been unable to find a feature possessed by all humans which is not also possessed by the animals humans eat. A person, though, can object in another way to the statement that eating meat is immoral. He can try to compare it to another action which we have agreed is not immoral. For example, he can compare it to eating plants. Let us suppose that we agree that eating plants is not immoral. It is now up to the person claiming that eating meat is immoral to point out a distinguishing characteristic between eating plants and eating meat. This, though, is fairly easily done. The animals which humans eat are conscious beings who are capable of feeling joy, suffering, and a desire to live. Plants, on the other hand, are not conscious and can not feel anything whatsoever. This is a reasonable objection to the comparison. There are some people, though, who will argue in perfect seriousness that perhaps plants feel pain and suffering or that perhaps other animals are not capable of feeling pain or suffering. I will address this issue later in the section titled "Determining if another being possesses consciousness" which is after the section on abortion. For now, under the assumption that plants, just like rocks, do not feel anything whatsoever, this is a valid objection to the comparison between eating meat and eating plants.

A person can also compare humans eating meat to the way in which other animals eat each other. The argument could go that lions eat zebras, but lions do not eat other lions. The argument could continue: Since animals in general eat members of other species but do not eat members of their own species, why shouldn’t we emulate the practice? There are problems with this argument even if such a statement were true. I think it is important to point out, though, that this statement is not true.

Cannibalism is quite common among animals. Lions eat other lions, bears eat other bears, and chimpanzees eat other chimpanzees. This is not necessarily the result of a food shortage. Such incidents occur even when there is a plentiful supply of food from other sources. In the case of lions, for example, a male lion sometimes eats the cubs of a female lion without a partner to protect her. The male lion does this because the female lion will not mate as long as she has cubs, but she will mate after the cubs are dead. For some species, cannibalism is extremely common. Approximately one fifth of the diet of a tiger salamander, for example, consists of other tiger salamanders.

But fundamentally, the problem with this argument is that it assumes that we should be basing our morality on the behavior of other animals. Other animals often engage in many activities, such as stealing food from members of their own species, which it would not be a good idea for humans to emulate. I bring this point up to illustrate that we should never attempt to justify an action by saying that other animals engage in it also.

But let us return to the issue of eating meat. A person can ask why we have an obligation to act better towards other animals than they do towards each other. The answer is that we have an obligation to act morally regardless of how others are behaving. Even if a small child, for example, does not behave morally towards others, we still have an obligation to act morally towards him. But a more serious objection can be raised. If a small child acts immorally, for example by unknowingly playing with a loaded gun, even though we still have an obligation to act morally towards him, we also attempt to stop him from engaging in such an activity. Should we, then, attempt to prevent lions from eating zebras?

Let us suppose that we have agreed that it is not immoral for a lion to eat a zebra. The question we are faced with is if there are any distinguishing characteristics between a lion eating meat and a human eating meat. One distinguishing characteristic is that the lion must eat meat or die. A lion can not decide to live on grain and vegetables. On the other hand, a vegetarian diet for humans is just as healthy as, if not healthier than, a diet including meat. Lions eat meat to survive. Humans eat meat for the pleasure of tasting meat. This appears to be a valid distinction between humans eating meat and lions eating meat.

Another distinction is that other animals hunt their prey while humans, for the most part, raise their prey in captivity. This is important for several reasons. One is that it is essential for lions to hunt prey in order for an ecological balance to be maintained. If all lions suddenly stopped hunting, it would be extremely detrimental to many of the animals in the region, including the prey species itself. Most humans, however, do not have this excuse. This distinction is also important for other reasons. One, for example, is that it can be argued that raising prey in captivity often causes far more suffering to the prey than does hunting.

So for these reasons, it appears that believing that it is permissible for lions to eat meat does not necessarily imply that it is permissible for humans to eat meat. That is, it appears according to the reasoning so far, that it is permissible for a human to eat meat only provided that it is both necessary for his survival and that he kills his prey in a way which helps keep an ecological balance. Both of these conditions have been met in certain geographic areas in certain times of history. However, they are not met today for an extremely large portion of the human race. So, it appears that the flaw in the comparison between lions and humans holds for an extremely large portion of human beings living in

our time period. As far as these people are concerned, the claim that it is immoral for them to eat meat has not been refuted by any of the preceding arguments.

Often, people incorrectly claim that humans need meat to sustain our large population. Refuting this claim does not involve a moral argument, just a factual one. Only a small fraction of the food an animal eats is converted into meat for human consumption. The rest is used up during the course of the animal's life for various functions. If our only goal was to sustain a large human population, land which currently grows food for livestock would be used to grow crops consumed directly by humans.

As in all of the examples I will give, I only cover a small minority of all the possible objections a person might have to a moral claim. In this particular case, there are many other objections which can be brought up. I believe that they can all be refuted as in the cases I have discussed. The way to convince another person is to have him attempt to come up with a valid objection to a moral claim. If he is successful, the person making the claim should concede, for the moment, that he is wrong. If no one is able to find a valid objection, though, then others should eventually start to believe the claim. Convincing another person, though, might be a long and slow process. It may perhaps be only after he has attempted an extremely large number of objections, which turned out to have flaws, that he may begin to accept that the claim is correct. Also, no answer is ever final. A person in the future may think of an objection or a flaw in an objection which no one has yet thought of.

There are many similarities of this process to the scientific method. The acceptance of a scientific theory can also be a long and slow process. It is only after the theory has been tested many times that people really begin to accept it. Also, no scientific theory is ever final. There is always a chance that someone in the future will find a situation where the theory breaks down.

This example, the morality of eating meat, was long due to the fact that I wanted to illustrate certain concepts. Most of the other examples will be considerably shorter.

Internal morality

In the introduction, I defined morality in terms of how a person's actions affect others. Is it possible that there exists an "internal morality" within this framework? In other words, is it possible for something to be immoral even though it does not harm anyone else? I believe that the answer is yes. My purpose here is not to come up with a complete list of all the cases where this occurs. Here, I will simply show how this is possible even under my definition.

Suppose that you deliberately fire a gun at another person. However, due to your poor aim, you miss and do no harm to anyone. Is your action immoral? Clearly, I would say yes. The only reason you missed is because you are a poor marksman. Had you been better, the person would be dead now. Attempting to kill this person in this way, but failing, is just as immoral as if you had attempted and actually succeeded.

Now, let us imagine a second scenario. Let us suppose that you wanted to kill this person. However, due to the circumstances, you were prevented from doing so. Perhaps, for example, you did not own a gun and didn't know how to buy one. Perhaps this person lived too far away or was too well protected. Perhaps you were physically able to kill him, but you were prevented from doing so only because you knew you would be caught and sent to jail. Are there any distinguishing characteristics between this scenario and the previous one? I do not think that there are. In both of these cases, no one else has been injured. However, if these restraints had not been there, this person would be dead. It would appear, then, that desiring to kill another person is just as immoral as actually killing them.

This is still, though, in accordance with my definition of morality. I defined morality in terms of actions. However, desiring to kill another person can be considered an action. I defined morality in terms of behavior intending to benefit others. The key word in that sentence is "intending".

I would like to point out what I do not mean by this claim. I do not mean that it is immoral to believe that killing another person is permissible. Desiring to kill a person is different from simply believing that it is not immoral to do so. Simply having an incorrect belief can be compared to believing that the Earth is flat. This only makes you a possessor of an incorrect belief. It does not make you immoral. I also do not mean that it is necessarily immoral to be in a state of mind where you would enjoy killing another person, while at the same time knowing that you would not do it even if you had the opportunity to do so without being caught. A person, for example, can say that he would enjoy killing his boss, but that he would never do it because it is wrong. This is not necessarily immoral. I inserted the word "necessarily" because I can think of at least one situation in which it would be immoral. It would be immoral if the only thing preventing this person from actually killing his boss is the fear of being punished in an afterlife. In this scenario, it is just like the case of the poor marksman.

I, of course, do not propose that we make it illegal to think certain thoughts or to have certain desires. I believe that everyone should have the legal right to wish for whatever they want.

Forcing your morality on others

I will now address the issue of when, if ever, it is permissible to force your morality on others. Some might want to believe that it is never permissible to force your morality on others. However, some reflection should point out that we already force our morality on others. When we pass a law making it illegal to kill people for pleasure, we are "forcing our morality" on those who believe that it is acceptable to kill people for pleasure. But, at the same time, not everything which is immoral should be made illegal. It may be immoral to "desire" to kill another person. However, I doubt anyone believes that this should be a punishable crime. Under what circumstances, then, is it permissible to "force our morality" on others by writing it into law?

Let us suppose that there is a group of people living in your country who believe in a religion which requires human sacrifice. What should we do? My answer is that we should allow them to believe in their religion to their heart's content. Everyone has a right to believe in whatever they want without

harassment from the government. However, should any of them ever attempt to actually engage in offering human sacrifices, then the legal system should step in. Laws should never attempt to regulate beliefs or desires. It is permissible, though, for laws to regulate certain "physical actions", such as attempting to engage in human sacrifice. An "action" such as holding a belief or having a desire does not count as a "physical action".

Some "physical actions", though, should also never be regulated. Going to your place of worship, for example, is a physical action. No government, however, should ever attempt to prevent you from doing this. The distinguishing characteristic between engaging in human sacrifice and going to a place of worship is that the first action harms others, while the second does not. The only time it might be permissible to "force our morality" on a person is when doing so is the only way to prevent him from physically harming himself or others.

The case of preventing a person from harming himself is not as clear as the case of preventing a person from harming others. After all, doesn't a person have a right to do to himself whatever he wants? Should we prevent adults from smoking because smoking is harmful? Should we prevent young children from smoking because smoking is harmful? Most people would answer no in the case of adults but yes in the case of young children. Is there a distinguishing characteristic between the two?

The way to answer this is by imagining two hypothetical situations. In both of these, a person wants to jump into a pit for entertainment. In both of these cases, doing so will result in several broken bones and extreme physical pain. In the first scenario, the person is completely aware of exactly how many bones he will break and how painful it will be. In this case, I believe that we have no right to forcefully prevent him from jumping. In the second case, though, the person believes that he will be perfectly fine. That is, he believes that the jump will result in no broken bones and in no physical pain. In this case, it may be permissible to forcefully prevent him from jumping. The distinguishing characteristic is that in one case, the person is aware of the fact that he is harming himself, while in the other case, he is not.

I would like to emphasize that although I advocate "forcing our morality" on others in certain situations, there are proper ways to go about it and improper ways to go about it. It may be permissible to do this through the consensus of the community by making use of a democratic system and fair trials. It is not permissible to do this through the use of vigilantes, through the use of a lynch mob, or through the decrees of a dictator.

Punishing a criminal for the purpose of deterring future criminals is also very different from punishing criminals for the purpose of revenge. I believe that punishing criminals for the purpose of deterrence is acceptable. However, I believe that punishing criminals out of revenge is unacceptable. Seeking revenge against another person makes no more sense than seeking revenge against a pole which your car ran into. We have a duty to act morally towards others regardless of how they behave towards anyone else. When we seek revenge, we neglect this duty.

When I talked about determining if it is immoral to torture a prisoner, I talked about imagining ourselves in the prisoner's position. When determining the appropriate punishment for a criminal, we should similarly try to imagine ourselves in the criminal's position. Just as a person who has almost never

experienced suffering would find this hard to do in the case of torture, a person who believes that he has never done anything wrong would find this hard to do in the case of the criminal. When deciding the appropriate punishment, we should always try to imagine that we ourselves or one of our family members had committed such an immoral act.

When we do “force our morality” on others, we should always bear in mind that there is a chance that we are wrong. We should always go about this business in a very careful and humble manner. We should always listen to other people’s arguments about why our moral beliefs are incorrect. We should also have punishments due to a violation of such a law accompanied by an explanation of why it is believed that the action in question is wrong.

Abortion

Is abortion immoral? People often claim abortion is immoral by comparing it to killing a newborn infant. Let us assume that we agree that killing a newborn infant is immoral. Is there a distinguishing characteristic between killing a fetus and killing a newborn infant? Simply saying "the characteristic of being a newborn infant" is not a valid distinction. The reason that it is not valid is explained in the section on eating meat. The ability to survive without external support can not be a distinguishing characteristic if we also want to believe that it is immoral to kill an adult who is temporarily on life support.

Can we find a valid distinguishing characteristic between killing an unborn child five minutes before birth and killing an infant five minutes after birth? I do not believe that we can. The baby does not change that much in that ten minute time period. So, assuming that it is immoral to kill a newborn infant, it appears that it is also immoral to kill an unborn child five minutes before birth. Well, what about six minutes before birth? We have to admit, the unborn child doesn’t change that much in that one minute. So, it appears, it is also immoral to kill a child six minutes before birth. The argument could be repeated for seven minutes before birth. However, where is the cut off line? It appears that we can keep repeating the argument, pushing the limit back one minute at a time. So is it immoral to kill a fertilized egg? Is it immoral to kill an unfertilized egg? Is it immoral to kill a sperm cell? A person can claim that abortion is not immoral by comparing it to killing a sperm cell. All he has to do is use the same "one minute at a time" argument. Assuming that we agree that it is not immoral to kill a sperm cell, it appears that we are in a dilemma. Which is the better comparison? Is having an abortion more similar to killing an infant or to killing a sperm cell?

To start out, let’s make it easy. Let’s suppose that we agree that it is immoral to kill a four year old boy but that it is not immoral to kill a sperm cell. What is the distinguishing characteristic between these two actions? One answer is that the four year old boy is a conscious being. The four year old boy feels a desire to live. The four year old boy is capable of feeling happiness, sadness, pain, or suffering. The sperm cell, on the other hand, is not a conscious being. It does not feel anything at all. This, it seems, is a good distinguishing characteristic.

So what about an unborn child? Is it a conscious being? Is a newborn infant a conscious being? Is a fertilized egg a conscious being? I will address these issues in the next section, which is titled "Determining if another being possesses consciousness". I need to point out that I do not use the word "conscious" in the manner which it is usually used. For now, let's assume that we agree that a newborn infant is conscious in the sense that it is capable of feeling sensations like pain. Let's also assume that we agree that a fertilized egg does not share this characteristic. If a baby has this characteristic five minutes after birth, then it most probably also has this characteristic five minutes before birth as well. If consciousness is the determining characteristic, then it would appear that it is immoral to kill a baby five minutes before birth. It also appears that we can not argue in this manner that killing a fertilized egg is immoral. This does not, though, say anything about if we will be able to argue in another manner that killing a fertilized egg is immoral.

The only thing we appear to have established so far is that if it is immoral to kill an infant five minutes after birth, it is immoral to kill a baby five minutes before birth as well. So what about earlier than five minutes before birth? If you believe that the baby is conscious five minutes before birth, then you probably believe that it is conscious half an hour before birth as well. But clearly, as you progress further back in time, we reach a gray area where we are not really sure. If you go further back in time, you will reach a stage where almost no one claims that this unborn child is conscious or is capable of feeling pain. So we have three time periods with extremely fuzzy borders. We have the end of pregnancy, where the unborn child is almost as likely to be capable of feeling pain as is a newborn infant. We have the beginning of pregnancy, where the unborn child is almost as likely to be capable of feeling pain as is a plant (and also where the majority of abortions occur). We also have the middle of pregnancy, which is a complete gray area with regards to the issue of the ability to feel pain. I will deal with this gray area in the section where I talk about consciousness in general. For now, let's talk about the other two areas.

First, let's discuss the end of pregnancy. Let us suppose that we agree that abortion is immoral in this stage provided that there are no health complications and that the pregnancy is not the result of rape. What if there are health complications? What if the pregnancy is the result of rape? If we are going to use consciousness as the distinguishing characteristic, then it would appear that the unborn child in this stage of pregnancy has the same rights as a newborn infant. Some people claim that it is OK to kill a newborn infant if it has severe health complications. Others believe that it is immoral to kill a newborn infant just because it has severe health complications. Some people would say that in a hypothetical situation where killing a newborn infant would be the only way to prevent damaging the health of the mother, killing the infant would be acceptable. Others believe that such an action would be immoral. For now, I'll just say that regardless of how a woman answers, she should be consistent. If she answers one way for the infant, she should answer the same way for the unborn child during the end of pregnancy. That is, unless someone can find a valid distinction between the two cases.

What about the period in the beginning of pregnancy, where the majority of abortions actually occur? The "ability to feel pain" argument seems to be a valid objection to comparing abortion at this stage to killing a newborn infant. Some people, though, might try to argue that it is even immoral to kill a fertilized egg by comparing this action to killing a person in a coma or a person in deep sleep. These people are not conscious either. However, there is a good chance that they will eventually wake up. There is, however, a significant distinguishing feature between killing a fertilized egg and killing a person

in a coma or a person in deep sleep. The person in deep sleep was conscious at an earlier time. If you had asked me, before I went to bed, how I would like it if someone killed me in my sleep, I would have responded that I would definitely not like it. In this case, the killer would be interfering with a desire to live. If you had asked me before I was a fertilized egg, though, how I would like it if I were aborted, I doubt I would have answered anything. In this case, the killer would not be interfering with any preexisting desire to live.

But still, people can try to argue that abortion at this stage is immoral by other means. A person can say, for example, that a human being comes into existence when the egg is fertilized. Well, what exactly does this mean? Does this mean that when developing our language, we decided to give fertilized eggs the name "human being"? If this is the case, then this argument is just a linguistics game and is meaningless. The laws of morality do not change just because we start speaking another language.

But what many people really mean by "a human being comes into existence" is that once the egg is fertilized, all the blueprints are present for the construction of a human being. However, imagine that you have a box containing one sperm cell and one unfertilized egg. Doesn't this box also have all the blueprints for the construction of a human being? Since we are operating under the assumption that it is not immoral to kill a sperm, "having all the blueprints" appears not to be a valid argument. But a person can point out a distinguishing characteristic between the two situations. A fertilized egg has a good chance of becoming an infant if we do not kill it. The two cells in the box do not. This objection can be overcome, though, by coming up with a slightly more clever scenario. Suppose that we have set up an artificial apparatus where a fertilized egg can safely develop into a newborn baby. Suppose also, that currently there is only a sperm and an unfertilized egg in this "test tube". The sperm is in the process of moving toward the egg. This system, which currently has no fertilized egg, will develop into an infant if we stand by and do nothing. Is it immoral to kill the sperm cell in this situation? This scenario now has all the "blueprint" characteristics that a fertilized egg does. If the blueprint argument is valid, then killing a sperm in this situation would be immoral. The only way to believe that the "blueprint" argument is valid is to reconsider the assumption that killing a sperm cell is not immoral. Upon hearing this scenario, some people who believe that killing a fertilized egg is immoral may indeed reconsider their belief that it is always permissible to kill a sperm cell. For now, however, I am just pointing out that if you believe that there is nothing ever wrong with killing a sperm cell, then there is a flaw in the "blueprint" argument.

There is another thing which a person can mean by the phrase "a human being comes into existence". He can mean that conception is when a "soul" enters the body. If this was the case, then this would be a good distinguishing characteristic between killing a fertilized egg and killing a sperm cell. In this case, people who have different beliefs about the nature or existence of a "soul" can genuinely have a disagreement about what the proper course of action is. However, I claimed that this "objective morality" is the same regardless of what a person believes about the existence of a soul. These two statements are not in conflict because what is at the heart of this type of disagreement is not a disagreement about moral principles.

In order to see this, let us imagine the following scenario. Suppose we are disagreeing on whether or not it is immoral to "force our morality" on a young child by preventing him from smoking cigarettes. Suppose that we both agree that it is permissible to prevent this child from smoking cigarettes provided

that cigarettes are harmful to his health. However, we disagree on whether cigarettes are harmful. That is, one of us believes that cigarettes do not harm anyone's health. Clearly, we are going to disagree on what the appropriate course of action is. However, we are not really disagreeing on moral principles. We are just disagreeing on the status of the situation. The same is true in the case of a disagreement about the existence of a soul and the morality of abortion. The two people arguing are not necessarily disagreeing about moral principles. Both of them may agree that it is immoral to cause harm to others. However, one of them believes that abortion will cause great harm to a "soul", while his adversary believes that there is no "other individual" who is being harmed. Just as in the case of the cigarettes, this is not a disagreement about moral principles but a disagreement about the status of the situation.

I will examine one more attempt to claim that abortion is immoral in the beginning of pregnancy. This is the claim that abortion is immoral because it prevents a possible future conscious human being from coming into existence. The flaw in this claim is that we are preventing a possible future human being from coming into existence every time we decide to not have sex. If a man sees a woman, and chooses not to rape her, then he is also preventing a possible future human being.

I do believe that it would be wrong for us as a people to all simultaneously decide not to have children and cause our generation to be the last. I think that collectively we have a responsibility to keep life going. However, this scenario of everyone simultaneously deciding not to have children is not going to happen. Since the real problem is currently overpopulation, I believe it is currently commendable for individuals to decide not to have children. Although we may have a responsibility to make sure that there is a next generation, it does not seem, based on the reasons discussed here, that we have a responsibility to ensure the existence of any particular possible future individual.

Determining if another being possesses consciousness

What we think about a moral argument can greatly depend on how we attempt to determine if another being is conscious. I will now address this issue. I first need to say that we can not establish very much, if anything, with 100% certainty. Perhaps your whole life has been a dream. We can not know with 100% certainty that this statement is not true. Nevertheless, we establish degrees of belief. If someone were to ask you, for example, to express as a percentage your degree of belief that it will rain tomorrow, you could answer 60%. For other things, we are more certain. If someone asked you to express as a percentage your belief that the sun will rise tomorrow, you could answer that it is very near 100%, but not quite. If someone asked you what your degree of belief is that your entire life is a dream, you could answer that it is very close to 0%.

What we need is a method for establishing a degree of belief about whether another being is conscious or has the ability to feel suffering. I need to say that when I use the word "conscious", I do not use it in the way it is generally used. I use it in a broader sense so that it, for example, includes a person who is asleep and dreaming. While dreaming, this person is capable of feeling happiness, sadness, pain, and suffering. In this sense, I say that the person is conscious.

Earlier I said that it is not currently possible to explain what suffering is because we can only understand this by experiencing suffering ourselves. Suffering, for this reason, is currently indefinable. Dictionaries attempt to define it, but they do not do a very good job. The same is true of consciousness. It is not currently possible to "explain" what consciousness is or feels like. It is only through our perception of our own consciousness that we come to understand what it is. Nevertheless, we need a method for attempting to determine if another being is conscious. Regardless of what this method is, we should apply it equally to everything. It would not be fair, for example, if we had a different standard for rats than we did for human infants.

Before we proceed, we should be aware of the blunders which some human beings have made in the past with regards to this issue. When the Europeans first encountered people from parts of Africa other than North Africa, some Europeans concluded these people are not conscious beings. That is, a few of the Europeans concluded these people from Africa do not "feel" anything any more than does a rock or a plant. Clearly, we should not repeat their mistake. Their mistake was not simply due to a lack of information. It was due to the criteria by which they determined consciousness. We have to make sure that the criteria we come up with give us the result that, based on the information these Europeans had at the time, these Africans were indeed conscious.

This automatically rules out one criterion which people like to use. This is the criterion of language. The Europeans in the previous example believed that these Africans did not have a language. These Europeans thought that the communication they were hearing was just a series of grunts which indicated things like the presence of danger or the location of food. These Europeans were, of course, wrong about this. However, based on the information these Europeans had at the time, it would not be possible to convince them that this communication was in fact a language similar to their own. The fact that we can not understand the communications of another being should never lead us to believe that this being is not conscious.

Language is not an acceptable criterion even if its definition is relaxed so that it includes any form of communication. This criterion would be so general that we would have to conclude that some plants are conscious as well, since some plants "communicate" with each other through releasing chemicals. In fact, we would have to conclude that all computers with a modem are conscious. Language, regardless of how strictly it is defined, is totally useless in determining consciousness.

Another thing I would like to point out is that consciousness is not the same thing as intelligence or the ability to reason. A severely mentally retarded person is just as conscious as is any other human being. It is possible for you to be conscious even while you are not "reasoning" about anything. In fact, you could be conscious even if you do not possess the ability to reason logically. Similarly, a computer can be extremely good at logical reasoning while at the same time possessing no consciousness whatsoever.

So what "is" a good criterion for developing a belief about if another being possesses consciousness? I have two answers. The first is the existence of something similar to a central nervous system. This does not necessarily say that consciousness is just a bunch of reactions occurring in the brain. It is just that I find it hard to believe that something like a plant, which has nothing even remotely similar to a nervous system, can be conscious. This does not say that it is impossible for plants to be conscious. It just says

that it is very unlikely. (I need to mention that there are some religions which say that plants possess a soul. However, the people who believe in these religions also often believe that plants spend their entire life in a state similar to deep sleep. So even if a person believes in one of these religions, he can still be consistent in agreeing with what I say here.)

The second criterion which helps us establish a degree of belief about the consciousness of another being is that being's behavior. If I found out that a particular human being did not possess a brain or anything similar to a nervous system, I would at first guess that he is not conscious. However, if I was then to see him engage in certain activities which human beings normally participate in, I would have to change my position. I would, of course, be very curious about how a person without a brain is capable of engaging in these activities. However, I would still have to conclude that this person is probably conscious. If he did possess a central nervous system, though, I would believe that he is probably conscious even without most of this behavior. Having either of these criteria be met is reason for believing that another being is conscious. Which "behavior" you choose to make as your criterion can be different than mine. However, we should be consistent and apply it equally to all beings. When deciding what "behavior" to choose, we should keep in mind the behavior the Europeans in the previous example saw, and make sure that they would come to the correct conclusion based on our criteria.

I would like to add that as far as the nervous system criterion goes, it is not that relevant if another being has a brain which is significantly smaller or simpler than our own. It would not be correct, for example, to say that a rat is not conscious because its brain is simpler and smaller than ours. To see why this is so, imagine that there exists an extraterrestrial which possesses a brain significantly larger and more complex than ours. If this extraterrestrial believed that this was a valid criterion, he would incorrectly conclude that we are not conscious. Whether or not another being is conscious has nothing to do with how large or complicated our own brain is.

Our degree of belief about if another being is conscious can be expressed as a percentage. I believe that other human beings are conscious with almost 100% certainty. I also believe with almost 100% certainty that animals such as dogs, cows, and rats are conscious. I also believe that certain insects are conscious, but with somewhat less confidence. If we continue to go to organisms with simpler nervous systems, my degree of belief continues to decrease. By the time we get to amebas and bacteria, my degree of belief has reduced to almost 0%. We can repeat this process in another way. I believe with almost 100% certainty that a four year old boy is conscious. I also believe with almost 100% certainty that an unborn child is conscious five minutes before birth. If we go to earlier stages of the pregnancy, my degree of belief will decrease. By the time we get to a fertilized egg, my degree of belief has reduced to almost 0%. Another person can choose to apply the criteria more stringently. However, he should apply them consistently and be aware of when his criteria have become too strict in that they exclude a large number of elderly patients or mentally retarded individuals.

So what do we do when we are completely uncertain about another being's consciousness? The answer is that we should do the same thing which we do when we are uncertain about the consequences of our actions in general. If we believe that a certain form of entertainment has a 5% probability of killing another person, then it would be immoral for us to entertain ourselves in that manner. The same result

should hold for a form of entertainment which will kill a being which we believe is conscious with 5% certainty. On the other hand, every time we choose to drive our car to work, there is an extremely small possibility that this action will end up killing someone. Nevertheless, driving our car does not become immoral as a result of this. The same results would hold in a similar situation where our degree of belief in another individual's consciousness had an equally low rating. However, the outcome would be different if the chances were equally low but the situation dealt with the lives of many individuals. It would be immoral, for example, to construct a nuclear power plant which has these odds of having a meltdown in the future. Again, the same result holds for uncertainty regarding the consciousness of a large number of beings.

War

Under what conditions, if any, is war permissible? Is it ever permissible to kill another human being? To answer this second question, let us recall the scenario of a gunman in a store. If killing the gunman is the only way to prevent him from killing the other people in the store, then most people would agree that killing this gunman is acceptable in this situation. So, it would appear that in some situations, it is permissible to kill another human being.

The problem is that currently, political and military leaders are far too ready to start wars. This results from the unfortunate fact that, for the most part, people do not currently value the lives of individuals living in other countries as much as they value the lives of their fellow citizens. To illustrate this, I will recall a specific incident. When President Bill Clinton was told that Saddam Hussein had attempted to assassinate former President Bush, Clinton reacted by bombing Iraq. This action ended up killing several civilians and increasing Clinton's approval rating in the United States. For now, I am not claiming that this action was wrong or that Clinton did this for the purpose of increasing his approval rating. I am just bringing this up to point out that the approval rating went up while civilians were killed. Suppose, though, that the bombing had instead killed an equal number of United States citizens who happened to be visiting Iraq at the time. What do you think would have happened to President Clinton's approval rating? My guess is that it would have dropped dramatically. This does not yet say anything about if it is right or wrong for a person to approve of such an action. It does point out, though, a lack of consistency in people's attitudes.

The sad truth is that people do not currently value the lives of foreigners as much as they value the lives of citizens of their own country. Another example of this is the way in which an airplane crash is reported. If you are watching the report in the United States, for example, you can be sure that you will be told how many of the victims were United States citizens. Upon reflection, though, this piece of information is not that much more important than how many of the victims weighed more than 150 pounds. I am not criticizing the media for reporting this information. They are just telling the public what they want to know. The real question, though, is why the public considers this to be an important piece of information?

Some people may attempt to defend placing more value on the lives of their own citizens than on the lives of foreigners. They may claim that duty to your own comes first. It is true that if you are in a burning building, you will probably save your own child before you save the child of a stranger. This is not necessarily immoral. It would be immoral, though, if you killed a stranger's child in order to save your own, as in the case of the involuntary organ donor which I described earlier. Valuing people's lives differently in war is far more closely related to the involuntary organ donor than to the burning building. If an action is immoral, then it is immoral regardless of who is doing it. It would not be consistent to believe that it is immoral for you to kill the guy living down the street while believing that it is permissible for a person from another country to do it. For this reason killing an "enemy" civilian in a time of war is just as immoral as is killing a civilian of your own country in order to achieve the same goal.

Here, I will not present a complete list of circumstances under which I believe it is permissible to go to war. I will just say that this decision should never be based on valuing anyone's life less due to the fact that they are from another country. The way to determine if a particular military action is permissible in a particular situation is the following. Imagine a hypothetical situation which is identical to the current situation with one exception. Imagine that the people you are going to kill include your own family. That is, if you are planning a military attack in which there is a chance that civilians will be killed, imagine that these civilians are your own family members. If you are planning an attack which will kill enemy soldiers who were drafted into the army, imagine that your family members had been drafted into the enemy army. If you are going to kill enemy soldiers who volunteered to go into the army, imagine that members of your family volunteered to go into this enemy army. If you can say that you would go through with the military operation even if it was your own family which was in jeopardy, then it would be consistent for you to say that this military action is permissible. However, if you answer that you would not go through with the military action if it was your family members, then to be consistent, you would have to conclude that this particular action is immoral. The lives of other people's families are no less valuable than those of your own.

There is a distinction, though, between killing a soldier and killing a civilian. Suppose that in the "gunman" scenario, we have only two ways to stop the gunman. The first way is to kill the gunman. The second way is to kill one of the bystanders. That is, we have to kill one person if we are going to stop the gunman from killing others. We have a choice, though, of who we kill. It can either be the gunman or it can be one of the bystanders. As I said before, the situations we come up with do not have to be realistic. If this was the scenario, I believe that most people would agree that the gunman is the better choice. In this scenario, killing the bystander would be immoral. The distinguishing characteristic is that one of these individuals is in the process of attempting to kill bystanders while the other individual is not. In a similar way, we can differentiate between killing military personnel and killing civilians.

I need to point out, though, that killing the gunman in order to prevent him from killing others is very different from killing a captured gunman after the danger has passed. Also, most would agree that it would be wrong to kill the gunman if there are alternative ways of stopping him. Similarly, we have an obligation to achieve our goals while attempting to minimize the number of enemy military casualties.

Is it ever permissible to launch an attack on a military target when there is a high chance that civilian casualties will result? Let's return to our gunman scenario. Suppose that we can stop the gunman only by killing both him and a bystander. If we do not, however, this gunman will end up killing one hundred people. If you agree that killing the gunman and bystander is permissible in this situation, then we can conclude that in certain extreme situations, it is permissible to kill civilians in an attack on a military target. This, however, is the exception and not the rule. We must give the same answer regardless of if these civilians are our family members or strangers.

I would like to say one more thing about this issue. We can not justify the death of civilians in such a situation by simply saying that it was "unintentional". Killing civilians in this situation is just as intentional as is killing civilians in a terrorist attack. In order to see the true meaning of the word "intentional", let us examine the following scenario. Suppose that a man is driving to work. On his way, he sees a pedestrian crossing the street against a "Don't Walk" sign. Suppose that the man knows that he will be late for work if he hits his brakes to avoid killing the pedestrian. As a result, the man chooses to run over the pedestrian. Did he kill the pedestrian "intentionally"? Clearly, the answer is yes.

The situation regarding attacks on military targets which kill civilians is no different. Suppose that a political leader is contemplating an attack on a military target. He asks his military advisers what the odds are that no civilians will be killed. His military advisers answer that they are extremely small. The best thing we can realistically hope for, they say, is that very few civilians will be killed. Killing these civilians by ordering the attack is just as "intentional" as is killing the pedestrian. Just like the pedestrian, the civilians are not the target; they just get in the way. Nevertheless, this does not make the act "unintentional".

The value of a life

Is it ever correct to say that the value of one life is worth more than another? Is it, for example, correct to say that the value of the life of a heart surgeon is worth more than that of a homeless person? Is it correct to say that the value of the life of an adult is worth more than that of an infant five minutes before birth? Is it correct to say that the value of the life of a human is worth more than the life of a rat?

To attempt to answer these questions, let us examine the meaning of the word "value". What do we mean when we say that the value of a certain book is equal to the value of ten sandwiches? All we mean is that we would have to pay the same price for buying either of these quantities in a store. If we lived in a barter society, we would simply mean that you can get ten sandwiches in exchange for this book. This, of course, can vary from individual to individual and change with time. In the barter society, maybe you will be able to run into a person who is willing to give you fifteen sandwiches in exchange for the book. In our society, maybe the price of sandwiches will fall in the future. There seems to be a fundamental error in believing that we can compare the "values" of different people's lives. This is the assumption that everything, including the value of a life, can be translated into something similar to a dollar amount.

Something such as a book or a sandwich has value only in the sense that it has potential value to some individual. Someone's life, on the other hand, is inherently valuable. That is, a homeless person's life is valuable regardless of if anyone else cares whether he lives or dies. If no one wishes to purchase a certain commodity, then this commodity has no value. On the other hand, if no one is willing to pay for medical treatment necessary to save a homeless person's life, this person's life does not become any less valuable.

These two very different types of value can easily be confused in a society which engages in practices such as slavery. In such a society, some might be incorrectly led to believe that the value of the life of a slave is equal to how much others are willing to pay for him. We currently have a similar situation in our society due to the fact that animals unfortunately still have the legal status of property. We should not be led to believe that the value of a dog's life is somehow related to the price people pay for him.

These two different types of value can also be confused even in a society which does not treat conscious beings as property. We should not, for example, attempt to measure the value of a human life by checking how high medical bills have to get before doctors choose to let a patient die. This monetary amount does exist. If saving a person's life required one hundred trillion dollars, for example, doctors would allow the patient to die. This is true due to the fact that, if for no other reason, no one has that much money. This should not lead us, however, to attempt to do something like equate the value of this patient's life with the amount of jewelry that this money could buy.

We should also not attempt to equate how valuable a person's life is with how valuable his skills are to his society. The skills of a heart surgeon are far more valuable to society than the skills of a homeless person. This does not imply, however, that this doctor's life is more valuable than that of the homeless person. Our skills are not an integral part of who we are. They are a possession, like a coat or a jacket. Tomorrow, this doctor may have a severe car accident in which he loses his ability to perform heart surgery effectively. Just as we may wear a different coat tomorrow, our skills tomorrow may also be different. We are still, though, the same person. The doctor's life is worth just as much before the accident as after. In this case, what is valuable to society is a possession. The value of our lives does not change based on what possessions we own. A person's life would not become more valuable, for example, if he were to suddenly become the owner of an advanced medical facility. The reason that this may be difficult to see in the case of the heart surgeon is that his death would imply the destruction of a possession which is extremely valuable to society.

We should also realize that intelligence, just as skill, is also only a possession. Suppose that a person has a brain injury which lowers his intelligence while leaving his memory and personality intact. He is still the same person, but his intelligence is different. People usually have no problem believing that a person's muscles or ability to run fast are just a possession. It is fairly easy to see that our arm is not an integral part of who we are. This is due to the fact that we might lose our arm and have it replaced by an artificial one. This is more difficult to imagine in the case of intelligence. This difficulty can be alleviated by imagining yourself sitting at a powerful computer. While using this computer, your ability to solve difficult problems quickly and accurately increases dramatically. A different person, who only has access to a cheap calculator, does not have the same advantage. Your life, though, is not more valuable than this other person's as a result of this. The aspect of your brain which deals with intelligence is no more

an integral part of who you are than is your arm. Just as we should not believe that our lives are more valuable than others due to the fact that we have access to a powerful computer, we should similarly never appeal to intelligence to judge the value of a life.

Sometimes we are in a position where we can only save a limited number of lives, and we have to choose who we save. Sometimes, one choice appears to be clearly better than another. However, this does not imply that the life of the individual you do not save is less valuable than the life of the individual which you do save. Suppose you are in a burning building and can only save one of two people. One of them already has burns so severe that he will probably live only for a few months afterwards. The other will be completely fine. The choice here seems pretty obvious. This does not mean that the values of their lives are different. It just means that you can do more for one than the other.

I believe that it is never correct to say that one conscious being's life is worth more than that of another. The value of a life is not a quantifiable value. In other words, it is not possible to equate it with something like a dollar amount.

Animal Rights

It is no longer as fashionable as it once was to value a person's life less due to the fact that he is of a different race, ethnicity, or religion. As I mentioned in the section on war, though, it is still fairly fashionable to value a person's life less due to the fact that he is a citizen of a different country. Leaders in the United States, for example, often attempt to unite people by saying something like, "Regardless of our race or ethnic background, all that counts is that we are Americans". Though it is good that such a speech points out that features such as race are irrelevant, I believe that this type of speech misses a more fundamental point. This is that whether or not a person is an American is also irrelevant. A life of a person living in Iran is not less valuable than that of a person living in the United States.

A person can attempt to circumvent this problem by changing the speech so that it says something like, "All that matters is that we are all human beings". However, just as the previous speech was flawed in that it left foreigners outside the circle of compassion, this speech appears to suffer a similar problem in that it leaves other species outside the circle of compassion.

In the section on eating meat, I discussed various attempts to find a valid distinguishing characteristic which could cause it to be permissible to eat other species while it is not permissible to eat our own species. There appeared to be none. If a person wishes to believe that such a characteristic does exist, then the burden of proof is on him to find it.

I did say that it appears that eating meat is permissible provided that we both need it for our survival and that we kill our prey in a way which helps maintain an ecological balance. However, this is not a characteristic distinguishing eating humans from eating other species. It is just that any scenario in which these criteria apply to human beings is going to be extremely unrealistic. To illustrate this, I will give an example of such a scenario. Suppose that two people are stranded in the desert with plenty of

water but no source of food. The only means of escape is to wait for a rescue. They know that help will arrive in a few days, but they also know that they will both die of starvation by then. As a result of these circumstances, they decide that it would be best if one of them was killed and eaten by the other. This way, one of them will survive. In this extremely unrealistic scenario, cannibalism appears not to be immoral.

The fact that it may be permissible to eat meat in certain scenarios does not imply that we should value another being's life less just because it is not human. To see this, let us slightly change this scenario of two people stranded in a desert. This time, there are two humans and one pig stranded. If any of these three are killed, the meat will sustain the other two long enough to be rescued. As I explained in the section on eating meat, it is not valid to say that it is the pig which should be killed simply because he is a pig. A person can attempt to claim that the pig should be killed because he possesses lower intelligence. However, if one of the two humans happens to be severely mentally retarded, then this distinction no longer applies. The fact that we are unable to find a distinguishing characteristic between eating humans and eating other species has enormous repercussions for other actions. The arguments could all be repeated in an almost identical manner, for example, in the case of killing animals for clothing or capturing animals for zoos.

Some people might agree that it is immoral for society in general to use animals for food or clothing, but attempt to claim that it is not immoral for them personally to do so. They might attempt to argue for this by pointing out that refusing to profit from the deaths of these animals will not bring them back to life. Let us suppose that we agree that it is not consistent for a person to believe that it is permissible for him to buy stolen cars while believing that stealing cars is immoral. If this is the case, then this position regarding animal rights is also inconsistent. People steal cars because they believe someone will buy stolen cars. When you buy a stolen car, you are hiring someone to steal a car for you. Similarly, when you purchase leather clothing or eat meat, you are hiring someone to kill animals for you.

When, if ever, is it permissible to experiment on animals to find cures to diseases? However we answer this, we have to be consistent. The way to decide if it is immoral to perform a particular experiment on an animal is the following. Imagine that animal testing was not available. Suppose that the only way to obtain the results you are after is to perform exactly the same experiment on a severely mentally retarded human being. If you answer that you would not perform the experiment in this case, then this tells you that the results of this experiment are not so important as to warrant the suffering or death of animals. If, however, you believe that this experiment is so important that you would even perform it on a human being if that was the only option, then you are consistent in believing that performing this experiment on other species is also permissible. I believe that human life is currently not valued high enough. None of what I have just written implies that we should value human life less. It only implies that we should value the life of other species more than we currently do.

People often try to argue for the use of lab animals by asking what you would do if you were in a burning building and could only save your child or a dog. It is true that people will save their child before they save a dog. It is also true that they will save their child before they save someone else's. These

actions are not necessarily immoral. This does not, however, imply that it is permissible for you to experiment on another person's child in order to find a cure for your own.

If the cure for a disease has been obtained in an immoral way, is it wrong for a person to use it? Again, regardless of how we answer, we have to be consistent. Imagine that instead of lab animals, the experimenters decided to use humans. We should give the same answer in both cases. There are some circumstances with regards to medicine where the analogy to buying stolen cars does not apply. The argument before was that buying stolen cars is wrong because it encourages thieves to steal cars. In some cases, using information obtained from previous immoral experiments will not financially benefit those who performed the experiments and will not encourage similar experiments in the future.

The analogy to stolen cars breaks down in another way as well. Under normal circumstances, I would not buy food grown with slave labor. Here, the stolen car analogy applies. However, if I were to find myself in a hypothetical world where all the food was grown with slave labor, I would not choose to starve to death. Here, the stolen car analogy does not apply. If we lived in such a world, it would be consistent for us to believe that slavery is wrong while simultaneously eating food grown with slave labor. Regrettably, this is the world in which we currently live with regards to medicine and the use of lab animals.

What about insects? Do we have an obligation to act morally towards them? With regards to morality, the distinguishing characteristic between plants and animals is that animals possess consciousness while plants do not. What we believe about our moral responsibility towards insects, then, strongly depends on if we believe that insects are conscious. I discussed how to answer this in the section on determining if another being possesses consciousness. I need to reiterate that what I mean by the word "conscious" is not what is necessarily meant by the general use of the word. If insects spend their entire lives in a state of mind similar to what we are in when we are dreaming, then they are conscious in the sense that I use the word.

Let us suppose that we believe that certain species of insects possess consciousness. If we believe that ants are included in this, for example, then it certainly implies that it is immoral to torment congregations of ants for pleasure. It also implies that we have a certain level of responsibility to avoid killing ants by stepping on them. Regardless of how hard we try, though, we are inevitably going to kill some insects during our lifetime. Regardless of how hard we try, some people are going to be killed in car accidents. This does not mean that we should all stop driving cars to avoid killing these people. Similarly, this does not mean that human civilization should come to a grinding halt to prevent the deaths of insects.

But even if insects do turn out to be conscious, there are still characteristics which separate insects from other animals such as birds and reptiles. One, for example, is an extremely short life span. Suppose that there is a terminally ill patient who has only five minutes to live. That is, suppose that we know with 100% certainty that this patient will die of natural causes within the next five minutes. Also, suppose that the only way to save the life of a fourteen year old girl is to kill this patient and deprive him of these

five minutes. It is possible to argue that in this case, killing the patient is permissible. In many cases, it is possible to compare insects to this type of terminally ill patient.

This, however, is very different from saying that it is permissible to kill insects because there is a great quantity of insects suffering and dying in the world at every instant. This would not be a valid argument. The fact that there may be many humans suffering and dying in a war on another continent does not imply that it is OK for us to kill our neighbor. The fact that there is already much suffering and death in the world does not imply that it is OK for us to add to it.

Part Four
Other Views

I will now briefly discuss other views regarding morality. I will discuss views based on a belief in an all powerful God, views based on reincarnation, and atheistic views. I will not discuss whether any particular religion is correct or incorrect. In the introduction, I claimed that this "objective morality" is the same regardless of which religion is correct. As a result, I will point out how my views can be reconciled with certain religious beliefs. In the end, I will discuss if the moral beliefs of human civilization improve in the long run with the passage of time.

Moral systems based on a belief in an all powerful God

Some people believe that all morality is based on the will of an omnipotent and benevolent God. In other words, if an action is immoral, it is because God made it that way. If an action is permitted by the correct religion(s), then according to this belief, it is not immoral. This belief, to some extent, is not internally consistent. If an action is immoral only because God made it that way, does this imply that God could have made it otherwise? Could God just as easily have made murder, rape, and torture good things?

Some people might respond that the answer is no because God is good. In other words, it would not be in God's nature to behave in such a way. However, we are operating under the assumption that an action is immoral only if God said so. Although this objection may point out that God would not suddenly change the rules of right and wrong, it says nothing about how he could have set up those rules in the first place. When creating the Universe, what would have prevented God from making murder, rape, and torture good? Since God had not yet defined right and wrong, God would not have been behaving "wrongly" by writing the rules of morality in such a way. If you believe that all right and wrong comes from God, you can not answer "no" by simply saying that God is good.

Suppose a person answers that yes, God could have made murder, rape, and torture good if he had wanted to. If this is the case, though, the statement "God is good" becomes fairly hollow and meaningless. Under this type of thinking, the only thing that the statement "God is good" implies is that God behaves according to the rules which He chose arbitrarily. This type of view also has a consequence far more serious than simply being inconsistent. There are some people who burn down other people's

places of worship, plant car bombs under school buses, and start religious wars because they believe that this is what God commands. This is often, I believe, the direct result of believing that all morality is defined by God and that God can define it any way He chooses. If you accept this way of thinking, then there is no way to point out that God would not command such things because they are immoral. After all, under this thinking, God could have defined morality any way He wanted. This is one of the reasons why it is not a good idea to claim that an action is not immoral because your religion permits it.

There is a way, though, to believe in an all powerful and benevolent God while still giving a consistent answer to this question. This question is, to some extent, just a variation of the old riddle of if God can create a rock which He can not lift. At first, it appears this riddle can not be answered by a person who believes that God is all powerful. However, this riddle can be answered once you redefine the meaning of the word "all powerful". A person can claim that by saying that God is "all powerful", all he means is that God is capable of doing anything which is logically possible. God would not, for example, be able to cause the statement "2+2=5" to be true. However, this does not prevent God from being all powerful due to the fact that this is not a logically possible task. Any task which is logically possible, this person could continue, can be accomplished by God.

It is possible to answer this question regarding God and morality in a similar fashion. This is by saying that causing the statement "torture is good" to be true is just as impossible as making the statement "2+2=5" true. Therefore, God is not capable of doing this but He is still all powerful. This type of thinking is completely compatible with my position regarding morality.

I still need to point out how a statement such as "Religion X permits action Y" can simultaneously be reconciled with statements such as "action Y is immoral" and "Religion X is the correct religion". There are two ways. The first is by claiming that due to different circumstances, actions which were permissible during the times of the prophets and/or messiahs are no longer permissible today. This argument can also work the other way. Perhaps actions which were wrong back then are no longer wrong today. A person can argue that the teachings of his religion include both general principles which apply in all times and specific examples of how these principles should be applied to a specific time period. The key, then, is to distinguish the general principles from the specific applications of these principles.

There is another way to reconcile these beliefs. There are some people who believe in Islam and also believe that it is wrong to have more than one wife. This is in spite of the fact that the Koran seems to permit having up to four wives. Some of these people reconcile their beliefs through the following argument. A society can only absorb a limited amount of change at one time. In pre-Islamic Arabia, men were permitted to have an unlimited number of wives. If God had specifically stated in the Koran that men should never have more than one wife, then not very many people would have listened to Muhammad at the time. Going down from an unlimited number of wives to a maximum of one would simply be too great a shock to absorb all at once. This is why, they say, the Koran seems to say that it is permissible to have up to four wives, when what God really wants is for people to have no more than one wife. This type of argument can be repeated with regards to other religions and with regards to other actions.

Moral systems based on a belief in perfect justice

Some people believe that all morality is based on something such as karma. Under this type of thinking, to state it simply, if you do something bad to others, something bad will happen to you in the future. Similarly, if you do something good for others, something good will happen to you in the future. Often, these beliefs go much further. Under this type of thinking, it is often believed that every bad thing which happens to you is the result of a bad action which you committed in the past. Similarly, every good thing which happens to you is the result of a good action which you have committed in the past. It is this belief which claims that there exists a "perfect justice" which I will be discussing. People who believe in this type of "perfect justice" usually also believe in reincarnation. A baby born blind is explained under this framework by saying that this child did bad things in a previous life. Being born blind, though, is not considered to be a punishment. It is simply a natural consequence of previous actions. This is the same way in which breaking a leg is not a punishment for jumping off the roof of a five story building, but just a natural consequence.

There at first appears to be a problem with basing a morality entirely on such a framework. Under this thinking, people who suffer from poverty and hunger are only in their positions because they behaved wrongly in the past. A person can then ask why it is that we should help these people. The answer to this at first seems to be fairly simple. A doctor should not refuse to treat a patient's liver problem just because the problem is the result of the patient's past drinking habits. It does not matter that other people's problems are a result of their own actions. We still have an obligation to help them.

However, the discussion can quickly become very complicated. If "everything" which happens to an individual is the result of that individual's past actions, then we can not affect what will happen to others. If this patient, for example, finds a doctor to cure his condition, then this is the result of the fact that this patient did a good deed in the past. If the patient is unable to find such a doctor, then it is only because he did a bad deed in the past. So if you are the doctor, regardless of what decision you make, you are not going to affect the outcome. If he deserves to find a doctor, he will find a doctor regardless of what you do. The key is in the fact that you do not know in advance whether or not he deserves to find a doctor. After you choose to help him, you will know that he did a good deed in the past to deserve this. Before you help him, though, you have no way of knowing.

If he deserves to get help, who will help him is not predetermined. Perhaps he will get help from you, perhaps from someone else. Nevertheless, he is predetermined to get help. So you are not really changing the outcome of events. In fact, you are incapable of altering the outcome of events with regards to others. But, if whether or not he gets help is totally independent of what you do, why is it that you should help him?

One answer is that helping him is in your own self interest. By helping him, you are ensuring that something good will happen to you in the future. If you refuse to help him, you are ensuring that something bad will happen to you in the future. However, this is just a selfish motivation. Usually, people who believe in this type of basis for morality also believe that actions should not be selfishly motivated. The way to resolve this difficulty is to emphasize that an action is altruistic if its "intention" is to benefit others. That is, although you can not influence the outcome of events with regards to this

patient, you are acting altruistically because your "intention" is to benefit him. As far as I can tell, a moral system based on this type of metaphysical framework does not contradict my position on morality.

Moral systems based on evolution and natural selection

Some people believe that morality is nothing more than behaviors which have evolved to help our survival. The argument for this view is often similar to the following. A society which condones murder is probably not going to survive very long. A society which forbids murder, on the other hand, is much more likely to continue. This is the reason that the societies which are around today forbid murder. In other words, natural selection decides which behaviors will survive the same way natural selection determines which species will survive. Some behaviors impede an individual's chances of survival in a community. Based on this view, this individual's belief that such actions are "immoral" is the result of evolution according to natural selection.

I believe that this type of reasoning regarding morality is flawed. Let us examine how natural selection really works in nature. There are certain bees called drones whose only purpose, as far as the hive is concerned, is to mate with the queen. Drones die immediately after mating. Some drones, however, miss their chance to mate and are still alive after the queen has mated. These drones are now useless as far as the rest of the hive is concerned. The other bees respond to this situation by killing these unproductive drones. So the rules of natural selection seem to imply that killing the unproductive members of a society is the way to increase the odds that you and your community will survive.

Human beings do not engage in the same type of behavior, nor should they. This points out that the natural selection view of morality is flawed for two reasons. The first reason is that it makes an incorrect prediction. The theory incorrectly predicts that humans will kill the unproductive members of society. The second reason is that it comes to a conclusion about morality which is unacceptable.

Survival does play a role in determining which behavior patterns will continue. However, survival is not the only factor. What this natural selection view of morality misses is that people can reflect on the morality of their actions. This reflection can overcome the survival criterion.

The theory of evolution is, though, entirely compatible with my view. We should be aware, though, that there is a factor which should be taken into consideration when studying the evolution of organisms like human beings. This is the factor of consciousness. It is reasonable to suppose that the existence of consciousness affects the behavior of an organism. Organisms such as plants do not have this characteristic, and it is possible to claim that all of a plant's characteristics have evolved to aid survival and reproduction. The behavior of organisms which do possess consciousness, though, is a different story. In this case, there may be more to it than just survival.

Moral systems based on maximizing "happiness"

Some people believe that morality consists of attempting to maximize a certain quantity. They disagree with each other on what this quantity is, though. Some, for example, believe that this quantity is happiness. I believe that there are severe problems in this type of thinking. To illustrate one of these, I will recall the scenario of the involuntary organ donor which I mentioned earlier. Suppose that there are two people who need an organ transplant. One of them needs a heart and the other needs a liver. We know that we will not receive these organs from any organ donors in time to save the lives of these two individuals. So, to maximize a quantity such as happiness, we decide to kill an innocent bystander and give his organs to them. In doing so, we have taken one life but saved two. Have we done the right thing? I believe that the answer is no. If maximizing certain quantities is our only moral guide, though, then the answer is yes.

There are additional problems if the quantity you choose happens to be happiness. Happiness is an emotional state and can hypothetically be induced with drugs. If we hypothetically had such a drug which caused no side effects, then under this type of thinking, the only moral thing to do would be to manufacture and use this drug as much as possible. I believe that such a conclusion can not be correct.

Moral systems based on self interest or a social contract

Some people believe that morality is based on something similar to a contract. That is, people make promises to each other such as, "I won't steal from you if you don't steal from me". These "contracts" are based on self interest. I will discuss two problems with this. The first is the consequences of this theory. One consequence, for example, is that there is no reason a society should not enslave an ethnic group which only makes up a small minority of the total population. All the slave owners could have made "contracts" to act "morally" towards each other because it is in their self interest to do so. Under this thinking, however, they have no reason to make a similar contract with their slaves if the slaves are in a position where they can not fight back.

There is a more serious problem with this type of thinking. If all morality is based on self interest, why is it that people should not violate the "contracts" they have made in the past? A person can agree to not steal from others if others do not steal from him. But after he makes this agreement, why is it that he should refrain from stealing when he is in a position where he will not get caught? It does not appear that this can be answered within this type of thinking.

There are some people who believe that a society can survive if everyone behaves in their own self interest. I do not believe that it can. People who attempt to base an economic theory on self interest, for example, assume that consumers and companies will behave according to self interest. However, these same people, without realizing it, then also assume that lawmakers, judges, and police officers will act benevolently. Otherwise, what is to prevent a food manufacturer from selling contaminated food? If "everyone" behaved in their self interest, then it would be fairly easy for this manufacturer to bribe officials to look the other way.

Do moral beliefs progress with time?

Do the moral beliefs of the human race improve with the passage of time? In order to attempt to answer this question, I would like to repeat something I wrote earlier. I am writing this in 1996. Fifty years ago, segregation was considered acceptable by the vast majority of the population in the United States. Two hundred years ago, slavery was considered acceptable by the majority of the world. Two thousand years ago, it was considered acceptable in Europe to feed prisoners to lions for public entertainment. If you look further back, it was not considered immoral to have servants buried alive with their recently deceased master.

Earlier, I wrote this to point out that checking the current laws or the current consensus is totally useless in attempting to determine the morality of an action. I believe that this also points out a general trend in history for morality to improve with the passage of time. In the short term, such as in the case of Nazi Germany, morality may decline. In the long term, however, I believe it gets better.

This, I believe, is analogous to the progress of science and technology with the passage of time. In the short term, civilizations may decline. Such declines may be accompanied by a decrease in the quality of math, science, medicine, and engineering. Nevertheless, the general trend is for such things to improve in the long run.

The difference between technology and morality is that there was an unprecedented burst of development of technology with the industrial revolution, while there was no accompanying burst of development with regards to morality. How technologically advanced a civilization is does not necessarily have a correlation to how morally advanced it is. We have to be aware of the fact, though, that neither technology nor morality improve simply due to the passage of time. They improve due to human effort and struggle.